United Nations A/73/292

General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 August 2018

Original: English

Seventy-third session
Items 14 and 28 (c) of the provisional agenda*

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Social development: literacy for life: shaping future agendas

Literacy for life: shaping future agendas and education for democracy

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/166, entitled "Literacy for life: shaping future agendas". In the resolution, the Assembly requested the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to continue its coordinating and catalysing role to provide support to Member States in enhancing capacities for policy formulation, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as sharing information and knowledge on policies, programmes and progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal targets connected with literacy, especially target 4.6 on youth and adult literacy. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director General of UNESCO, to submit to it at its seventy-third session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

Literacy is recognized as a foundation for lifelong learning and sustainable development. Despite progress in the field, a substantial number of young people and adults, especially women, have poor literacy skills, preventing them from participating fully in society and in the economy. Many children and adolescents do not achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics at school, creating a large population of adults with low-level literacy, a situation that requires special policy and funding attention. Target 4.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals recognizes this problem and reaffirms the commitment to achieving universal literacy through lifelong learning. UNESCO continues to support Member States in developing capacities in literacy policy formulation, programme implementation, innovation, and monitoring and assessment.

* A/73/150.

** The present report was submitted late to reflect the most recent information.

18-12492 (E) 300818

Please recycle

The present report also addresses the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/8 entitled "Education for democracy". In its resolution 67/18, the Assembly invited Governments, agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to intensify their efforts to promote education for democracy. In its resolutions 69/268 and 71/8, the Assembly re-emphasized the importance of intensifying efforts to promote education for democracy and requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director General of UNESCO, to report to it at its seventy-first and seventy-third sessions, respectively, on the implementation of the resolutions.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 71/166 entitled "Literacy for life: shaping future agendas", the General Assembly expressed its conviction that literacy is crucial to the acquisition by every child, young person and adult of the essential life skills that will enable them to address the challenges that they may face in life and represents an essential condition of lifelong learning, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the knowledge societies and economies of the twenty-first century.

2. Although progress has been made, 750 million adults around the world remain non-literate (and the majority are women);[1] many more do not have sufficient literacy proficiency to meet the demands of their work and social lives. Worldwide, an estimated 22 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 are not in employment, education or training, 77 per cent of them being young women.[2] The global adult literacy rate for the population aged 15 years and older was 86 per cent in 2016, while the youth literacy rate (for those aged 15 to 24 years) was 91 per cent. South Asia is home to almost half of the global illiterate population (49 per cent), while 27 per cent of illiterate adults live in sub-Saharan Africa, 10 per cent in East and South-East Asia, 9 per cent in North Africa and West Asia, and 4 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Less than 2 per cent of the global illiterate population lives in the remaining regions combined (Central Asia, Europe and North America and Oceania). Youth literacy rates are generally higher than adult literacy rates, reflecting the recent increase in access to primary education among younger generations.[1]

3. The description of the state of literacy contained in the paragraphs above may not even properly reflect the scale of the population whose right to quality education has not been fulfilled, especially if the expanded notion of literacy as a continuum of proficiency levels is applied. Despite the increase in enrolment in primary education, more than 617 million children and adolescents are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics.[3] Low-level literacy skills often go hand in hand with poor vocational, citizenship and life skills. Moreover, in a rapidly changing world, previously acquired literacy and numeracy skills and competencies can rapidly become insufficient or outdated.

4. Given this scenario, urgent action needs to be taken to scale up literacy efforts worldwide and operationalize the expanded notion of literacy by establishing and strengthening national education systems to enable individuals to acquire and continuously improve their proficiency skills in literacy and numeracy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is supporting the literacy efforts of Member States by targeting youth and adults with low levels of literacy, with a particular focus on female adolescents and adult women in Africa.

5. Recognizing the importance of youth and adult literacy, national Governments worldwide have agreed to include a specific target on youth and adult literacy and numeracy as one of the 10 targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4. In target 4.6 Member States are requested to ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030. The progress made towards improving policies, provision and outcomes on literacy must, therefore, be analysed and reported on within the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 in particular.

---

[1] See UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Literacy rates continue to rise from one generation to the next", Fact sheet No. 45, (Montreal, Canada, September 2017).

[2] International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a Better Working Future* (Geneva, 2017).

[3] UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "More than one-half of children and adolescents are not learning worldwide", Fact Sheet No. 46 (Montreal, September 2017).

II. Advancing the global literacy agenda

6. As spelled out in the Incheon Declaration of the World Education Forum 2015 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action,[4] the principles, strategies and actions of target 4.6 are underpinned by a contemporary understanding of literacy not as a simple dichotomy of "literate" versus "illiterate", but as a continuum of proficiency levels that depend on specific contexts. The notion of literacy as a learning continuum of different proficiency levels has been one of the most significant developments with regard to how literacy is conceptualized. It regards literacy not as a stand-alone set of skills that can be developed and completed within a short time frame, but as a continuous process of learning throughout life. This expanded notion of literacy obviously influences policies and programmes: the focus is now on improving literacy proficiency levels and providing learning opportunities for all throughout life, and not on project-based literacy programmes focusing on basic literacy skills.

7. Moreover, literacy and numeracy skills are now considered contextual. Multisectoral partnerships reflect this integrated and holistic approach to literacy and are necessary to respond to the diverse needs of learners while linking literacy to other areas of sustainable development — in particular, environmental sustainability, gender equality, skills for work and entrepreneurship, and peace (Sustainable Development Goals 3, 5, 8, 9 and 16, respectively).[5] In addition, rapidly evolving digital technologies have had far-reaching effects on work and social life. This has created a need for lifelong learning programmes aimed at improving digital skills; including higher-order skills for manipulating, interpreting, displaying and communicating information in different forms, including through written texts.

The Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee

Established in 2016, the Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee is the main global coordination mechanism on Sustainable Development Goal 4 that harmonizes and strengthens support to countries and partners and drives action to achieve the education-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Given the scale and ambition of the Agenda, this multi-stakeholder mechanism provides strategic guidance to Member States and the education community, makes recommendations for catalytic action, advocates for adequate financing and monitors progress towards education targets through the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the *Global Education Monitoring Report*. It is not only a channel for strengthening partnerships but also provides two-way communication for global and regional action.

The Steering Committee is composed of Member States, the convening agencies of the World Education Forum 2015 (UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the World Bank and the International Labour Organization), the Global Partnership for Education, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, regional organizations, teacher organizations and civil society networks, in addition to representatives from the private sector, foundations, academia and youth and student organizations.

[4] Available at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656E.pdf.

[5] See UNESCO, *Reading the Past, Writing the Future: Fifty Years of Promoting Literacy* (Paris, 2017).

The road map for achieving the education goal is the Education 2030 Framework for Action, adopted by the international community in November 2015. The Framework stipulates that periodic meetings on global education for all, aligned with the meeting schedule of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, will be organized by UNESCO in consultation with the Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee.

The next global education for all meeting, to be hosted by Belgium, will be held in Brussels from 3 to 5 December 2018. The high-level forum will bring the international community together to take stock of progress and identify strategic priority areas requiring political guidance and intervention for the effective achievement of the education-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The global education for all meeting in 2018 will focus on the theme of the high-level political forum for 2019, namely, "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality", and will review progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, including through its interlinkages with the other goals.

III. Six strategic areas to advance the global literacy agenda

8. Employing the expanded and holistic notion of literacy provided above, the present section describes the actions carried out by UNESCO in response to General Assembly resolution 71/166 since the seventy-first session of the Assembly in 2016, in six strategic areas:

(a) Improving national education policies, strategies and plans for youth and adult literacy;

(b) Scaling up literacy initiatives for girls and women;

(c) Improving the quality and delivery of literacy programmes and promoting innovative approaches to literacy;

(d) Enhancing literacy assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems and capacities;

(e) Furthering research and knowledge creation and advocacy for youth and adult literacy at the global, regional and national levels;

(f) Learning cities to promote inclusive and equitable societies.

9. During the reporting period, UNESCO continued to coordinate, advocate for and catalyse action towards the implementation of target 4.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNESCO also provided support to Member States, in close collaboration with partners, in building capacities for policy review and development, programme design and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, to enhance youth and adult literacy. Specific actions are outlined below.

A. Improving national education policies, strategies and plans for youth and adult literacy

10. Given the persistent literacy challenge around the globe, it is critical to ensure that youth and adult literacy is adequately reflected in education sector policies, strategies and plans and receives sufficient funding so that efficient and relevant literacy learning opportunities are developed. This calls for a sector-wide and cross-

sectoral lifelong learning approach involving stakeholders from all relevant fields, at the national and local levels, representing all groups of society, as well as a comprehensive governance and monitoring structure.

11. UNESCO, in collaboration with international and governmental and non-government partners, provided technical support to Member States to strengthen the capacities of policymakers and planners at the national and subnational levels. The technical support involved conducting global training, developing customized project-based activities, building the capacities of national institutions, policymakers and planners, providing systematic reviews and improving existing policies. UNESCO also developed a new e-learning course for national policymakers and planners with the purpose of equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to mainstream adult literacy and non-formal education into education sector plans. Another example of policy improvement and development is the leading role played by UNESCO in engaging with indigenous peoples, including support for mother-tongue-based multilingual education.

12. UNESCO also played a critical role in the development and improvement of regional and national education policies on specific literacy issues. This included the development of normative frameworks for language in education policies, such as bilingual literacy education policies and teacher-training policies for literacy and basic education for children, youth and adults. The concrete results of the technical support in this area can be seen in several promising cases in West Africa, which were developed in close collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States and the ministries of education of its States members. In Senegal, for example, national partners received technical support in reviewing existing teacher-training policies and practices to develop a comprehensive normative framework that has since resulted in the development of pre-service training modules for teachers of literacy and basic education for children and adults.

13. In Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO provided assistance to selected countries to leverage their educational policies, including adult competency frameworks and programmes for community learning centres. Literacy is one of the priorities for South Asian countries under the Framework for Action. UNESCO has therefore been working towards organizing a subregional meeting on literacy, which is scheduled to be held in late 2018.

14. Several countries developed or promoted national strategies on literacy from a lifelong learning perspective. The Ministry of Education and Human Development of Mozambique established a national curriculum for primary education for youth and adults as well as learning assessment tools for adult literacy and education. These normative documents are aligned with the country's adult literacy and education strategy and the gender strategy for the education sector. In South Sudan, the pastoralist livelihood and education project framework was developed with the support of UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as an important milestone in ensuring an integrated approach to establishing a normative framework for the provision of education services to marginalized pastoralist communities. In India, the National Literacy Mission Authority, the Ministry of Human Resource Development and UNESCO collaborated in a shared objective to promote literacy from a lifelong learning perspective as a means to promote sustainable peace and development. Furthermore, UNESCO provided technical support for policy review and development in Kenya, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and many other countries with the financial support of China, Finland, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Sweden and others.

15. At the subnational and local levels, UNESCO also contributed to policy development and improvement. In Pakistan, UNESCO played a critical role in the development of provincial literacy and non-formal education policies in the provinces of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan because of the decentralization of education in the country. With the technical assistance of UNESCO, an inclusive literacy and non-formal education policy and strategy was also developed for the Abuja region in Nigeria.

B. Scaling up literacy initiatives for girls and women

16. The benefits of developing the education and literacy of women and girls are well documented. They include higher participation in the labour market; reduced fertility rates and improved health; delayed marriages; the reduced likelihood of contracting the human immunodeficiency virus for girls (and boys); increased earnings for women and associated poverty reduction; improved child and family health and nutrition and the associated benefits for quality of life; increased productivity; and reduced pressure on social services for health. Literate women are also more likely to enrol and keep their children, and particularly their daughters, in school.

17. To address this challenge, UNESCO worked with Member States to ensure that education sector policies and plans included literacy programme activities that targeted female adolescents and young and adult women. This issue concerns every region of the world where literacy rates are at the lowest levels and in which there is a greater proportion of out-of-school youth (e.g., sub-Saharan and North Africa, West and South Asia). Other efforts to scale up literacy actions for girls and women required UNESCO and partners to mobilize additional resources, as detailed below.

18. Through the UNESCO Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education "Better Life, Better Future" initiative, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive literacy and basic education policies and programmes were developed in Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Iraq, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania. From 2016 to 2018, UNESCO worked with Burundi, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, South Sudan, the Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania to integrate gender-responsive literacy and basic skills into their national development strategies in order to support peace, social cohesion and sustainable development.

19. Through the implementation of the UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education initiative, 10 projects in Cambodia, Egypt, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam were supported to widen access to education, improve retention and completion rates and enhance the quality of education for girls. Through this initiative, Cambodia implemented a project to improve the literacy skills of young female garment workers by providing literacy classes in the workplace and developing quality literacy learning and training materials for use in the workplace. In Egypt, integrated literacy classes at community learning centres improved girls' and women's literacy skills and knowledge of health, livelihood and citizenship matters. In Mozambique, there were improvements in the programme design, management and evaluation of literacy programmes targeting vulnerable women and their families in pilot communities in the northern part of the country. In Mauritania, efforts focused on the expansion of literacy and skills development opportunities for girls and women through community learning centre programmes and the reintegration of out-of-school youth into formal education. In Pakistan, provincial education institutions were supported to implement literacy

initiatives in underprivileged areas such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where literacy rates among girls and women are extremely low.

20. The innovative literacy and education programmes of UNESCO also included a focus on gender equality and justice. In the context of the project on advancing mobile literacy learning, funded by the Microsoft Corporation, UNESCO employed technological solutions to improve the quality of and expand access to literacy programmes through information and communication technologies. In Egypt and Ethiopia, in particular, these programmes were offered to 900 women between the ages of 15 and 45. In Egypt, a digital learning tool was based on the El Mara'a We El Hayah (woman and life) literacy curriculum, which integrates literacy with personal health, empowerment, life skills and digital competencies. In Bangladesh and Mexico, most of the beneficiaries of technology-based literacy programmes were women and girls.

21. With the support of the Governments of Finland, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Sweden, UNESCO provided technical support to the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan in order to develop capacities and improve the quality and relevance of literacy programmes for young and older women, especially in rural communities. Concerted efforts were also made to hire and train female literacy facilitators, establish more literacy classes for women in rural communities and develop gender-responsive curricula and learning materials. UNESCO further supported the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan in systematically planning, improving and evaluating literacy interventions with a gender lens.

22. Another example of the work of UNESCO in South Sudan is the support it provides to out-of-school girls and boys as part of the Community Girls' Schools initiative. With support from the Global Partnership for Education and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in South Sudan, UNESCO supported 213 community girls' schools in 2017 in enrolling 6,781 children (4,280 girls and 2,501 boys) who otherwise would not have had an opportunity to attend school. The initiative uses an accelerated learning approach that allows learners to complete the normal five-year course of elementary education in four years, thereby encouraging girls and boys who may have started school late to catch up and continue their education. This approach has helped South Sudan to expand the provision of literacy and numeracy instruction to marginalized communities and has contributed to closing the gender gap in the enrolment of girls and boys.

23. The focus on women and literacy was also reflected in UNESCO publications. In particular, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning published a study entitled *Promoting Health and Literacy for Women's Empowerment*, which presented the strong links between health, well-being, women's empowerment and education, focusing on the role of literacy, and highlighted the benefits of integrated approaches to literacy for women.[6]

C. Improving the quality and delivery of literacy programmes and promoting innovative approaches to literacy

24. UNESCO is committed to supporting countries in improving the quality and delivery of literacy programmes. In terms of quality, UNESCO worked with regional centres, national partners and institutions in the following areas: establishing and improving curriculum frameworks and standards; creating flexible learning pathways and equivalency frameworks; improving the management and monitoring of literacy programmes; and improving the training of literacy facilitators and adult educators.

[6] Available at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245698e.pdf.

Several innovative interventions in the areas of family literacy and intergenerational learning and the use of information and communication technologies to support literacy learning warrant special mention in the present report. Those interventions are described below.

25. Based on successful practices in South Africa and Uganda, a family literacy and intergenerational learning approach has been developed to improve the literacy skills of parents and children in preschool and primary school settings. Family and intergenerational literacy programmes create synergies between early childhood care and education, primary education and adult learning and education. Intergenerational approaches develop the literacy, numeracy and foundational skills of both adults and children and empower disadvantaged families to support their children more effectively at school. UNESCO has developed systematic practical guidelines on how to design and pilot such an approach. Following the publication of the guidelines, UNESCO has undertaken related capacity-building in Ethiopia and the Gambia since 2017, with the financial support of Germany. In Mozambique, with the support of the Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education, a contextualized gender-sensitive pedagogical model for family literacy programmes has been implemented. Instructional and learning manuals were developed, integrating basic knowledge of nutrition and health and positive parenting. National education staff, including literacy teachers, were trained in the delivery of these gender-sensitive family literacy programmes.

26. Since 2015, UNESCO has supported the implementation of the project on advancing mobile literacy and learning in selected communities in Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia and Mexico. Funded by the Microsoft Corporation, the project is aimed at improving the literacy skills of disadvantaged populations with the support of contextually relevant technological solutions. The planning, implementation and monitoring of project activities have been guided by the principles of Government and community ownership and by bottom-up, participatory approaches. Through this project, digital materials have been collected and new materials developed to support literacy learning as part of a blended learning approach linked to governmental and non-governmental literacy and livelihood programmes. Preliminary findings on the impact of the project were presented at the UNESCO Mobile Learning Week in March 2018, with an emphasis on the extent to which the literacy and digital skills of youth and adult learners have been developed in those four countries.

27. Since 2016, UNESCO, in partnership with Pearson, has been advancing the UNESCO-Pearson Initiative for Literacy: "Improved Livelihoods in a Digital World". The Initiative is aimed at investigating, documenting and sharing new approaches that enable youth and adults with low levels of literacy to profit from inclusive digital technologies, which, in turn, will strengthen their literacy and digital skills. A landscape review was undertaken to discover how, if at all, technology is currently designed to be inclusive and user-friendly, including for those with a lower level of digital and literacy skills. The initiatives span a range of areas — health, agriculture, government, displaced populations and green and environmental practices — and each illustrates how appropriately designed digital solutions can create entry points into the knowledge society for people with low literacy levels. The landscape review and case studies will be reflected in forthcoming UNESCO guidelines, notably on ways to identify more inclusive digital solutions which will help to develop the literacy skills of users and improve their livelihoods in the twenty-first century. The guidelines will be addressed to digital solution providers, implementing and donor agencies, development partners and Governments.

28. Within the framework of a regional literacy agenda, and in order to build national capacities in the Arab States, UNESCO increased its support to the Regional Centre for Adult Education in Egypt. UNESCO worked with Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania

and the Sudan on capacity-building for youth and adult literacy programmes and activities. The Organization also worked with Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic on education targeting out-of-school children and youth. National literacy campaigns were initiated in Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia and the Sudan. In South-East Asian countries, UNESCO strengthened its partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which adopted the Declaration on Strengthening Education Systems for Out-of-School Children and Youth[7] in 2016. To translate this commitment into action, UNESCO supported the evaluation and improvement of equivalency programmes for children and youth in Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Timor-Leste. UNESCO also supported capacity-building for equivalency programmes in Bangladesh, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

29. With regard to adult literacy programmes in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO provided support to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan and Timor-Leste in enhancing and updating literacy curricula and building the capacities of education officials and literacy providers and educators. With the support of UNESCO, the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan developed and validated the national youth and adult basic education curriculum framework and a set of performance indicators for basic proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy, equivalent to grade 3 of formal general education. In the next few years, the Government of Afghanistan will establish a curriculum framework for youth and adult basic education to align the performance indicators in literacy and numeracy equivalent with grade 9 of the formal school system. Based on the basic literacy and numeracy level, the capacities of literacy curriculum and material developers in designing learner-centred and activity-based instructional and learning materials in Dari and Pashto were systematically developed. In Pakistan, UNESCO, in collaboration with other development partners, supported the provincial authorities of Balochistan and Sindh in developing a non-formal education curriculum, textbooks, assessment tools and an equivalency mechanism to improve the quality of literacy provision and outcomes. Moreover, the Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan was supported in developing a nationally accredited teacher training certificate course on non-formal education with the objective of improving the delivery of quality literacy programmes. Curriculum writers in the Southern African subregion (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe) participated in two regional workshops on literacy material development. A partnership project between UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on pastoralist livelihoods and education in South Sudan combined livelihood interventions with literacy components and developed a literacy and mainstream public-school education curriculum suited to the pastoralist way of life.

30. In 2017, the celebration of International Literacy Day and the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes focused on the theme "Literacy in a digital world". Both provided an opportunity to review the literacy skills required to participate in increasingly digitally mediated societies and the implications for policies, practices, monitoring and evaluation, as well as literate-friendly environments. Potential risks to privacy and security and to cultural and linguistic diversity were also explored, and consideration was given to how to minimize those risks and ensure equity and equality in order to turn the digital divide into a digital opportunity. Numerous events were held at the national, regional and global levels to celebrate International Literacy Day. Participants in the UNESCO international conference on the occasion of International Literacy Day on the theme "Literacy in a digital world", which was held in Paris on

[7] Available from http://asean.org/asean-declaration-on-strengthening-education-for-out-of-school-children-and-youthooscy/.

8 September 2017, broadly agreed that literacy today includes digital skills but recognized that understanding of literacy is context-specific and evolves as the surrounding environment changes. UNESCO International Literacy Prizes were granted to programmes that exemplify various effective ways of responding to transformations in literacy learning brought about by digital technology, in Canada, Colombia, Jordan, Pakistan and South Africa.

D. Enhancing literacy assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems and capacities

31. The importance of valid and reliable evidence is critical for improved literacy policies and programmes. During the reporting period, UNESCO continued to monitor literacy progress and update statistical information and publications through the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the annual *Global Education Monitoring Report* and the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. As the Sustainable Development Goal 2030 Education Steering Committee shifts global attention to relevant and effective learning outcomes, five global indicators (4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.4.1, 4.6.1 and 4.7.1) focus on learning outcomes. In this context, Member States will need to develop and produce more accurate data based on the measurement of learning outcomes. Such data will also help to improve policymaking and to mobilize and allocate resources for targeted literacy interventions at the global and national levels.

32. With this in mind, the Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning was set up by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and officially launched in 2016 with the objective of achieving a global consensus on the frameworks and methodology of measuring learning outcomes to report on five of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4. One of the targets focuses on youth and adult literacy, and its associated global indicator (4.6.1) is aimed at measuring the percentage of the population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills. As part of the work undertaken by the Alliance, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, in close collaboration with the Institute for Statistics, continued facilitating work on the development of global measurement frameworks on literacy and numeracy. It has taken a two-pronged approach to the work by, on the one hand, facilitating the development of global measurement frameworks for literacy and numeracy to enable countries to collect reliable data and report on indicator 4.6.1, and, on the other hand, strengthening national capacities to develop frameworks, systems and tools to measure proficiency levels in youth and adult literacy and numeracy. Since 2017, the Institute for Lifelong Learning and the Institute for Statistics have organized two expert meetings, in November 2017 and May 2018, to advance work on developing a measurement strategy on indicator 4.6.1. Initial proposals on the development of a global expanded assessment and reporting framework for literacy and numeracy are being discussed.

33. The development of effective policies and relevant programmes is hindered by the absence of solid evidence on the learning outcomes of participants in literacy programmes. To fill this gap, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has worked in close cooperation with UNESCO field offices, regional bureaux and partners on developing and strengthening national capacities and establishing regional standards to measure literacy learning outcomes through a project on the theme "Action research measuring learning outcomes of adult literacy programmes". The project is aimed at providing national policymakers and development partners with reliable data on youth and adult literacy learning outcomes and to establish a mechanism for assessing the learning outcomes of youth and adults participating in literacy programmes. This information is key to evaluating the quality of programmes and to informing policy decisions and mobilizing funds. The project is also aimed at

strengthening national capacities and improving South-South cooperation with an emphasis on national ownership and sustainability. In 2016, the project entered a new phase by expanding from an initial 5 to 12 countries in Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Congo, Mali, Morocco, the Niger, Senegal and Togo. The second phase of the project covers a period of four years (2016–2020) and comprises various implementation phases. National teams were established and now include more than 120 specialists from ministries, universities and statistical bureaux, as well as consultants. A ministerial information meeting in November 2017 confirmed the high level of political will to implement the monitoring and evaluation of literacy programmes as part of national evaluation systems. To date, the second-phase results include the development and validation of harmonized competency and assessment frameworks at the subregional level, with plans to pilot the assessment surveys in 2019.

34. UNESCO also provides training for national teams of statisticians to improve national monitoring data and information systems for the commitments of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and national education priorities. In the context of capacity development, UNESCO promotes the development of national indicators, frameworks, corresponding data sources and a quality assessment tool for each of the sources. Key achievements include the development of a set of global training tools that is being rolled out in selected countries through the implementation of the UNESCO Capacity Development for Education programme.

35. At the national level, UNESCO continued to strengthen capacities to improve and manage the non-formal education management and information system in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chad, Haiti, Iraq, Mauritania, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Suriname. In Pakistan, UNESCO and other partners facilitated capacities to improve the non-formal education management and information system to promote the effective monitoring and evaluation of literacy interventions in the country. In Nepal, UNESCO supported the Ministry of Education in enhancing capacities at the central and local levels for the monitoring and evaluation of literacy. UNESCO also provided technical advice on improving existing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for literacy in Mali, Morocco, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and South Sudan. Since 2017, UNESCO has helped the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan to pilot a Global Positioning System-based monitoring system with real-time data.

E. Furthering research and knowledge creation and advocacy for youth and adult literacy at the global, regional and national levels

36. In its capacity as a clearinghouse for literacy, UNESCO collects, analyses and disseminates information and knowledge on promising practices in the field of literacy. In addition, the Organization undertakes policy-oriented research and collaborates with other specialized research institutions and networks, including the UNESCO chairs in literacy.

37. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has the most comprehensive collection in the area of youth and adult literacy worldwide. Its strength lies in its historic dimension, international orientation and the wealth of specialized literacy curriculum materials. The Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network, coordinated by UNESCO, connects 106 documentation and information centres from all regions of the world. A UNESCO policy brief on how libraries can support national literacy efforts was produced in consultation with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the Beyond Access project of the International Research and Exchanges Board and representatives of national and community libraries.

38. The capacity-building work of UNESCO with national institutions and partners in the design and implementation of effective literacy and numeracy programmes depends on its rich knowledge base. Between 2009 and 2018, the UNESCO Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database made available 230 case studies on promising programmes that embed literacy and numeracy teaching and learning in their curricula. Since it was made available online, this database has been accessed by around 200,000 users per year. To ensure greater access to and use of the database worldwide, case studies are now available online in English, French and Spanish. Additionally, the Institute for Lifelong Learning has begun translating the case studies into the other official languages of UNESCO. In future, UNESCO plans to collaborate with regional institutions and national partners to translate and disseminate case studies. Thematic compilations drawing on the database have been proved to be another effective way of sharing good practices in more targeted ways to support advocacy and capacity-development interventions on specific themes. Since 2016, two compilations have been published, *Literacy in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts: Effective Approaches to Adult Learning and Education* and *Fostering a Culture of Reading and Writing: Examples of Dynamic Literate Environments*.

39. UNESCO has continued advocating for literacy through global consultations and events, major initiatives and cross-sectoral partnerships to raise the profile of literacy on national and global agendas. The annual celebrations of International Literacy Day on 8 September, together with those of other international days, have been major opportunities for advocacy. In 2016, the fiftieth anniversary of International Literacy Day was celebrated with policy dialogues around the world. At the global level, a global meeting on the theme "Reading the past, writing the future" was organized in Paris on 8 and 9 September. To mark the occasion, UNESCO produced a publication entitled *Reading the Past, Writing the Future: Fifty Years of Promoting Literacy*. The publication describes the significance of this period of history and charts the evolution of understandings of literacy, the positive measures taken and actual progress in terms of literacy skills and their impacts on people's lives. It also illustrates the remaining challenges and the troubling fact that, because of population growth, the number of non-literate adults is actually higher now than it was 50 years ago, even though the global literacy rate has increased.

40. As mentioned above, International Literacy Day in 2017 focused on the theme "Literacy in a digital world". International Literacy Day in 2018 will revisit integrated approaches that connect literacy and the skills required for work under the theme "Literacy and skills development", and will explore effective responses in terms of policies and practices to evolving skills requirements in our increasingly digitalized and globalized world. The UNESCO International Literacy Prizes programme continued to provide awards and recognition annually to five outstanding literacy practices on International Literacy Day, with the support of China and the Republic of Korea. These Prizes support the clearinghouse function of UNESCO and contribute to enhancing a global knowledge base on effective practices, which includes the Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database. Other important events, such as International Mother Language Day, UNESCO Mobile Learning Week and World Teachers' Day, also continue to be key instruments in promoting literacy and literate environments worldwide.

41. The Director General of UNESCO officially launched the Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning on 8 September 2016 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of International Literacy Day. The Alliance was established in response to General Assembly resolutions 68/132, 69/141 and 71/166. The Alliance is a multi-stakeholder partnership for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, in particular target 4.6, and focuses on the areas of advocacy,

policy and knowledge-sharing and digital resources, including open educational resources.

42. In some countries, UNESCO collaborates with other partners to promote non-formal and literacy education for youth and adults. In Pakistan, as part of the non-formal education subgroup under the National Education Development Partners Group, UNESCO contributes to the coordination and dissemination of research, knowledge products and advocacy materials for non-formal and literacy education. A national forum was co-organized by UNESCO to promote literacy and define the way forward to improve literacy in the country.

43. As a lead United Nations agency, UNESCO is currently preparing for the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019. UNESCO has consulted a range of stakeholders and other agencies to develop an action plan for organizing this event.

F. Learning cities to promote inclusive and equitable societies

44. To address the many complex changes in the world today, UNESCO established the Global Network of Learning Cities to support cities in developing holistic and integrated approaches to lifelong learning, recognizing the needs of all learners. The Network promotes policy dialogue and peer learning among members, fosters partnership, provides capacity-building and develops instruments to encourage and recognize progress in building learning cities. Local governments, being the closest level of government to people, are well placed to link the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to local communities and are particularly encouraged to make cities and human settlements more sustainable.

45. The mission of the Network has become all the more pertinent as a growing number of cities have identified lifelong learning as a key to tackling challenges relating to their social cohesion, economic development and sustainability. In order to achieve fairer and more inclusive societies, learning opportunities need to be provided for people of all ages and at all education levels, in particular for marginalized and vulnerable groups. This includes the promotion of literacy and numeracy skills through formal, non-formal and informal delivery mechanisms.

46. The city of Giza, Egypt, which received a UNESCO Learning City Award in 2017, provides an example of how cities can promote literacy through community engagement. Giza launched a comprehensive literacy initiative through which citizens who take literacy classes and receive literacy certificates are entitled to receive free health care and to participate in further education. To support the initiative, the city worked with universities to implement a programme encouraging students to take part in efforts to promote literacy. Students volunteering to help other community members to acquire reading and writing skills are compensated for their contribution. For example, once students have assisted a minimum of five people, they receive a financial incentive or a free training course. Compensatory packages of this kind help to foster community learning and intergenerational exchange.

IV. Education for democracy

47. The present section explores the implementation of resolution 71/8 on education for democracy. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly identifies the connections between democratic governance, peace, sustainable development, the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals underlines that all learners should acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including through the promotion of a culture of

peace and global citizenship. Education for democracy is vital to nurture responsible and active learners, capable of contributing effectively to peace and prosperity in their societies and beyond.

48. The challenges regarding the implementation of education for democracy outlined in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Literacy for life: shaping future agendas and education for democracy" (A/71/177) continue to exist, including the lack of universally agreed definitions, overlap with other programmes such as human rights education and the sensitivity of such issues.

49. To address these challenges, new approaches are needed to foster the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are important for learners to participate in shaping positive social change. These include cognitive, socioemotional and behavioural capacities. Action is required across the board in formal, non-formal and informal education and through lifelong learning.

50. Education for democracy has been implemented in national education systems across the world under different headings and through different topics, including education on citizenship, civics, human rights, peace and intercultural dialogue. In support of Member States, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have supported the development of relevant educational programmes.

51. The scope of activities that can be referred to as education for democracy is vast. It includes actions taken by United Nations agencies and programmes to promote education for democracy in a range of education settings.

52. The work of UNESCO on education for democracy is carried out within the framework of its global citizenship education programme, which takes into account local contexts, as well as concepts that convey the aspirations of global citizenship education in national practices, while fully respecting human rights. UNESCO is engaged in global and regional advocacy and capacity-building initiatives, as well as the provision of guidance for policymakers, teachers and curriculum and textbook developers. This includes promoting youth engagement as well as media and information literacy to prepare citizens to participate in political and social life and to prevent intolerance.

53. Building on its multisectoral mandate, UNESCO promotes education for democracy through the development of knowledge and educational approaches that foster respect for human rights and intercultural dialogue, with an emphasis on countering racism and discrimination and preventing violent extremism. UNESCO has established regional global citizenship education networks in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa and among Arab Member States. This work is supported by the category 1 UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development and the category 2 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding. The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network is a key mechanism for embedding democratic principles in classrooms, school governance, student participation and project management.

54. The United Nations Democracy Fund supports civil society organizations that empower youth, women and marginalized groups to analyse information, develop leadership skills and participate in decision-making. The Fund supports projects that develop democracy and human rights education and contribute to reducing educational inequalities around the world. Since 2016, it has promoted education for democracy through projects on education about human rights and civic participation for rural populations, particularly youth and illiterate women, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya. In Colombia, a project financed by the Fund is advocating for education to become a national priority as a fundamental element in addressing inequality.

55. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports 60 countries in electoral processes to enhance understanding of such processes, broaden the engagement of all stakeholders, enhance civic engagement and advance transparency. Targeted campaigns enhance the participation of vulnerable or marginalized groups, including women, youth and people with disabilities. UNDP also supports training for national and international observers, the media and political parties, as well as voter education. Building on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and recognition of the role of education in advancing human rights and global citizenship, UNDP supports 70 national parliaments in engaging in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

56. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) contributes to increasing awareness of human rights standards and their protection through education, public information and capacity-building. It fosters participation in decision-making and the rule of law within democratic systems. Human rights education is a feature of the work of OHCHR and its field presences. The Office coordinates the World Programme for Human Rights Education that encourages national human rights education programming. It supports human rights education programmes by providing advice and developing and disseminating training and educational materials and other public access resources.

57. The approach of UNICEF to education for democracy focuses on learning and skills, including skills for empowerment and active citizenship from early childhood to secondary education and skills training. In 2017, UNICEF launched the Life Skills and Citizenship Education initiative in the Middle East and North Africa region with Governments and regional partners. UNICEF supports the integration of peace and social cohesion education in national education systems. Through the Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy programme, UNICEF has reviewed the contribution of education to peace in Liberia, Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda, underlining the roles of education ministries in strengthening inclusion.

58. These examples highlight the range of activities to promote education for democracy undertaken around the world, which are vital to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

V. Recommendations on future action on literacy for life and education for democracy

59. **Based on the present report, the General Assembly may wish to consider:**

Literacy for life

(a) **Recognizing literacy as a right, as a foundation for lifelong learning and as a continuum of different proficiency levels;**

(b) **Inviting Governments to formulate legal frameworks and policies aimed at building learning pathways and offering learning opportunities for all throughout life, especially for the most marginalized and excluded members of society;**

(c) **Encouraging Governments and partners to work towards intersectoral approaches to literacy, including integrating literacy in vocational training, health education and active citizenship for sustainable development, and to seek innovative solutions to improve quality and expand access to such programmes;**

(d) **Calling upon Governments, development partners, specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system, civil society and**

the private sector to accelerate and enhance efforts to make youth and adult literacy a priority, to scale up literacy provision for children, youth and adults, with particular attention to those who are vulnerable and marginalized and to women and girls, and to mobilize sufficient, effective and sustainable funding to achieve this goal;

(e) Urging international development partners and Governments to ensure that funds mobilized by and channelled through existing international financing mechanisms for education, including the Global Partnership for Education, Education Cannot Wait and the International Financing Facility for Education, also explicitly target and benefit youth and adult literacy;

(f) Requesting UNESCO to continue to play a coordinating and catalysing role in the implementation of target 4.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals and to continue to support Member States, in collaboration with partners, in the areas of policy formulation and planning, programme design and implementation, assessment, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as generating and sharing knowledge and information;

(g) Requesting the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director General of UNESCO, to submit to the Assembly at its seventy-seventh session a report on the present recommendations;

Education for democracy

(h) Furthering efforts to bolster through education the connections between democratic governance, peace, sustainable development and the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

United Nations A/73/293

General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 August 2018

Original: English

Seventy-third session
Item 26 of the provisional agenda*
Agriculture development, food security and nutrition

Agriculture development, food security and nutrition

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

World hunger is on the rise after several years of decline. Urgent actions are needed to ensure sustainable food production systems, revitalize the agricultural sector, promote rural development and empower traditionally excluded groups, in particular, smallholder farmers and small-scale producers within local food systems. Nutrition is also in the spotlight as a key component of these efforts. The present report highlights interlinkages across the Sustainable Development Goals as a means to address key challenges and accelerate progress and outlines key means of implementation to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

* A/73/150.

18-12777 (E) 310818

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 72/238 on agriculture development, food security and nutrition, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its seventy-third session on the implementation of the resolution and called upon the relevant organizations of the United Nations system, within their respective mandates and resources, to ensure that no one was left behind and no country was left behind in the implementation of the resolution.

2. In providing information and annual updates on global efforts to achieve the internationally agreed goals on agriculture development, food security and nutrition, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1), the present report includes contributions from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the High-Level Panel of Experts of the Committee on World Food Security, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Standing Committee on Nutrition and the Scaling-Up Nutrition movement; it also draws from inputs to the high-level political forum on sustainable development and other sources, including the secretariat of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

II. Overview

3. After a prolonged decline, world hunger appears to be on the rise again. In *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017* report, jointly issued by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO), it is estimated that the prevalence of undernourishment — corresponding to Sustainable Development Goal indicator 2.1.1 — increased to 11 per cent in 2016 from 10.6 per cent in 2015. This represents an increase to 815 million undernourished people worldwide in 2016, up from 777 million in 2015, but still down from 900 million in 2000. Trends show that severe food insecurity disproportionately affects rural areas, where populations are also heavily impacted by poverty, and that rural women in particular are the most affected by both food insecurity and poverty in all regions. Their livelihoods mainly depend on agriculture, with smallholder family farmers providing the vast majority of the food consumed by local rural communities and the urban poor.

4. Disasters and the effects of climate change can also severely affect vulnerable populations. Strengthening the resilience of rural communities and promoting the preservation and restoration of resources and ecosystems have key importance for ensuring the wellbeing of vulnerable segments of the population, in particular in rural areas and in countries in conflict or emergency situations. According to *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017*, an estimated 689 million people in the world (9.3 per cent of the world population) experienced severe food insecurity, according to the global Food Insecurity Experience Scale, which is the tool used to produce Sustainable Development Goal indicator 2.1.2. The highest levels of severe food insecurity are in Africa, where it affects more than one quarter of the population — almost four times the levels found in any other region.

5. It is estimated in the 2018 *Global Report on Food Crises*[1] that the number of people experiencing crisis food insecurity rose in 2017 from 108 million people in 48 countries to 124 million people in 51 countries. Vulnerable populations in four countries faced a risk of famine — in north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan

[1] Food Security Information Network (2018).

and Yemen. Some 30 million people in those four countries alone experienced severe hunger, largely driven by conflict and exacerbated by climate-related events. The global humanitarian community mobilized around $2 billion to contain famine in South Sudan and avert it in the other three countries. Nearly 15 million people in the four countries were reached through a mix of cash and emergency livelihoods support. With approximately 80 per cent of the affected populations in the four countries relying on agriculture, support to safeguard livelihoods, increase local food production, protect and enhance nutrition and ultimately save lives was essential. Despite the massive humanitarian response, the number of people in crisis food insecurity in the four countries rose throughout the year by a further 5 million, demonstrating that, while humanitarian assistance is crucial to avert famine and save lives, it is not sufficient on its own to address the root causes of hunger and starvation.

6. It is not yet clear whether this recent uptick in hunger forecasts the beginning of an upward trend or whether it reflects an acute, but temporary, aberration. What is clear is that economic slowdown, gender inequalities, armed conflict, drought and other weather-related disasters linked to climate change are among the key factors contributing to a reversal in the long-term progress in fighting global hunger, making the prospect of ending hunger and malnutrition by 2030 more difficult.

7. Malnutrition manifests itself in various forms, with children's malnutrition having particularly serious and long-term consequences for the world's population. While declining in almost every region, stunting still affects one out of five children under 5 years of age, with three quarters of these children living in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. No substantive decrease is observed in wasting, while obesity is increasing, often coexisting with undernutrition and other forms of malnutrition. Currently some 1.3 billion people are classified as overweight and 600 million as obese. These numbers are expected to double by 2030. Overweight and obesity are linked to diet-related non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and many types of cancer.

8. The drivers of overweight and obesity are largely to be found in unhealthy diets often conditioned by existing food systems and food environments — the physical, economic, political and sociocultural context in which consumers engage with the food system — that might limit consumers' purchasing power or the availability of food and, thus, influence their dietary choices. Rapid urbanization and lengthening food value chains, changing lifestyles and rising incomes are combining to produce a dietary transition that features increased reliance on processed foods high in fat, sugar and salt content and nutrient-dense food, in particular dairy and animal proteins, that far exceed daily requirements.

9. Food safety and the impact of unsustainable practices of food systems on animal and human health are also matters of serious concern. Worldwide, one in 10 people falls ill and 420,000 people die every year owing to contaminated food, with children under 5 years of age accounting for almost one third of mortality.[2] The burden is particularly heavy in the same regions affected by extreme poverty and hunger. Overuse or misuse of pesticides and other chemicals in crop and feed production, inappropriate use of veterinary drugs such as antibiotics in animal production, including in livestock and aquaculture, the massive concentration of farm operations and growing trade in both plant and animal-based food and feed, resulting in longer food/feed chains have significantly increased the risks to human and animal health from food systems. These risks include the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance and the rapid international spread of foodborne disease outbreaks. Other pressing risks include the increasing or persistent problems of mycotoxins, marine

[2] *WHO Estimates of the Global Burden of Foodborne Diseases* (Geneva, WHO, 2015).

biotoxins and zoonotic diseases. Climate change is also affecting food safety through many other pathways.

10. Depletion of biological diversity is also heavily affecting food security. Biodiversity can play a key role in ensuring food and nutrition security, the sustainability of food and agriculture systems and the resilience of ecosystems and communities, as well as increase benefits across other dimensions of sustainable development.

11. Conserving the genetic diversity of plants provides the basis for adapting crops to future changes in environmental conditions or in demand for products and services. At the end of 2017, global holdings of seeds and other plant genetic materials conserved in 90 countries and 16 regional and international centres totalled 4.89 million samples, representing a 1.0 per cent increase over the previous year. An increase in the germplasm conserved under medium- or long-term conditions has been observed in 31 countries. However, overall modest progress has been made in securing crop diversity. The number of countries reporting under the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture increased by 9.7 per cent, reflecting a better awareness of the importance of conserving and monitoring ex situ holdings.

12. Genetic diversity in livestock species is equally important to enable their survival in diverse contexts, reducing risks for human and animal health, and to provide a wide range of products and services (food, fibres, manure, etc.). It also provides the basis for adapting livestock populations to future changes in environmental conditions or in demand for products and services. Across the world, however, 67 per cent of local breeds (i.e., breeds occurring in only one country) are classified as of unknown status, meaning that basic data on breed population is unavailable. Of the local breeds whose risk status can be assessed, 26 per cent are at risk and only 7 per cent not at risk.

13. Smallholder family farmers continue to be disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, with unequal access to land and other productive resources. Globally, there are 570 million family farms, and the vast majority of those farms are less than 2 hectares of land. They produce over 70 per cent of food and account for almost all food consumed by rural communities and urban poor, but use roughly 30 per cent of available agricultural land, often less fertile, while farms of more than 50 hectares use two thirds of arable land.[3] Extreme poverty also continues to be concentrated in rural areas and is one of the main drivers of hunger; more than three quarters of the extreme poor live in rural areas, with the majority of this group deriving their livelihoods, to at least some extent, from small-scale farming. Lack of adequate investment and enabling policies keeps smallholders vulnerable to shocks, including the effects of weather-based events, climate change and conflict and contributes to the persistent lack of resilience of local food systems and smallholders' livelihoods.

III. Accelerating progress, closing gaps and overcoming challenges by addressing interlinkages among the Sustainable Development Goals

14. Ending poverty and hunger in all their dimensions are the top priorities of the Sustainable Development Goals. Today some 767 million people live below the

[3] FAO — The state of food and agriculture 2014: Innovation in family farming (2014); Samberg and others, 2016, "Subnational distribution of average farm size and smallholder contributions to global food production", *Environmental Research Letters*, vol. 11, No. 12 (November 2016). Available at http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/11/12/124010/meta.

extreme poverty line.[4] Some 80 per cent of the extreme poor live in rural areas, and most depend on agriculture — crops, fisheries, livestock and forest resources — for their livelihoods, but levels of productivity and income that are often inadequate to reduce either poverty or hunger. Ending poverty requires raising rural incomes and increase productivity sustainably as to transform rural livelihoods. Inclusive and sustainable development of agriculture and food systems can and must play a critical role.

15. It is critical to ensure that trade-offs across Sustainable Development Goal 2 targets and among different dimensions of sustainability impacting on food security are identified. Competing use of resources, including land and water, present challenges to balance the needs to increase production to meet increasing food demand while sustainably managing and using natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, to balance the affordability and quality of food available. These are among emerging challenges faced in the implementation of policies, programmes and plans on food security and nutrition and on sustainable agriculture in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

16. Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 is also closely linked to other key dimensions of sustainable development, in particular the sustainable management and use of natural resources and ecosystems. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that poverty eradication, food security, nutrition, health, agriculture, water, energy, climate change and sustainable management and the use of terrestrial and marine and ecosystems must be addressed holistically, using systems thinking and integrated approaches. The development of resilient and sustainable food systems, integrated territorial development and stronger rural-urban linkages are of paramount importance for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

17. As the world population becomes more urbanized, the demand for food and natural resources is increasingly concentrated in urban areas. Rural and peri-urban areas, through sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries, will play an important role in meeting this increasing demand. The importance of rural-urban linkages and the role of food and agriculture were acknowledged in the New Urban Agenda, connecting Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 11 and linking to others as well. The rapid and haphazard manner in which towns and cities are expanding is creating challenges, such as rising social inequalities, which will lead to higher absolute numbers of poor and hungry people in urban areas than in rural areas. Inequalities particularly affect small-scale actors working in agriculture and food systems, at least in part due to the rural location of many of these activities in the presence of persistent rural-urban inequalities and lack of effective rural-urban linkages.

18. In many rural contexts, the prevailing patterns of land rights, specifically the lack of recognition and protection of the rights of smallholders, in particular women, explain why some people are more vulnerable to hunger than others, especially women and indigenous peoples whose claims on land are often not respected and/or enshrined in norms/customs or in law. This issue, central to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2, cuts across goals on gender, inclusive economic growth, reducing inequalities, life on land, ecosystems and partnerships. Enhancing the land rights of smallholder farmers is therefore a priority, in particular for supporting local food systems, maintaining food and agrobiological diversity and maintaining the nutritional benefits associated with traditional diets.

19. Women producers are even more likely impacted by the non-fulfilment of their rights — in particular, rights over land, other productive resources and services, decent work and participation in political processes at all levels. This represents a lost

[4] World Bank, *Taking on Inequality*, Poverty and Shared Prosperity (Washington, D.C., 2016).

opportunity, as evidence shows that, when enabling conditions are in place, these actors are key agents of change promoting food security and nutrition, as well as inclusive — and employment-generating — economic growth.

20. Agroecological approaches can support biodiversity conservation and sustainable water management while reducing reliance on agrochemicals, which is necessary to transform food systems while safeguarding the environment and protecting human health and nutrition. Over 30 countries have already developed public policies that support agroecology, promoting integrated sectoral approaches at the national level. These policies help in scaling up the adoption of agroecological practices. Policies for agroecology often include mechanisms of interministerial cooperation in support of an integrated approach, innovative governance arrangements that involve family farmers and other food system actors in policy deliberations and territorial approaches in support of context-specific and integrated solutions. By optimizing biological synergies that integrate crops, trees, livestock and fisheries and aquaculture, farmers using agroecological practices enhance ecological functions, leading to greater resource-use efficiency and resilience by managing ecosystem services that are frequently mobilized using landscape-scale conservation.

21. Disasters affect all dimensions of food security, including economic and physical access to food, availability and stability of supplies and nutrition. Disaster losses are accentuated in poor households and communities and result in long-term consequences for food security, health, education and other critical dimensions of human welfare. Climate change acts as a multiplier of existing threats to food security and nutrition. It will make extreme weather events more frequent and intense, land and water more scarce and difficult to access and increases in agricultural productivity even harder to achieve. This could potentially accelerate urbanization and intensify conflicts over even more scarce resources, likely leading to new humanitarian crises, migration and displacement.

22. Climate change will disproportionately impact the most vulnerable people, especially women and children, and their livelihoods — ultimately putting hundreds of millions of people at risk. By 2050, the risk of hunger and child malnutrition could increase by up to 20 per cent due to climate change. Emphasis on increasing food production must be matched with equal emphasis on protecting lives and livelihoods and on ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable have adequate access to adequate food and nutrition. Countries must move from managing disasters to managing risk, in order to help people and communities build their resilience. While humanitarian response to crises save lives and protects livelihoods, underlying vulnerabilities — such as high levels of exposure to disaster risk and gender inequality — often persist. Addressing them requires comprehensive, multi-year and multi-partner action, led by national Governments and local communities.

23. Fisheries are extremely vulnerable to environmental degradation, climate change and overfishing. Overfishing not only reduces food production, but also impairs the functioning of ecosystems and reduces biodiversity, with negative repercussions for sustainable social and economic development. To achieve sustainable development of fisheries, fish stocks must be maintained within biologically sustainable levels — at or above the abundance level that can produce maximum sustainable yield. According to an FAO analysis of assessed stocks, the fraction of world marine fish stocks that are within biologically sustainable levels has declined from 90 per cent in 1974 to 68.6 per cent in 2013, requiring a strong strategy and stringent management to restore the overfished stock.

24. Water stress affects countries on every continent. Not only does it hinder the sustainability of natural resources, it also hampers economic and social development, disproportionately affecting the most disadvantaged people. Western Asia and

Northern Africa, as well as Central Asia and South-East Asia, are the regions with over 60 per cent water stress, meaning that they face serious water stress, at least during parts of the year. Most other regions are below that threshold, however, and the majority remain well below 25 per cent of initial water stress.

25. Agricultural biodiversity — the diversity of plants, animals and other organisms used for food, both cultivated and wild — is a critical element in response to global malnutrition and underpins healthy, nutritious and sustainable diets. It is essential to nutrient rich diets. It contributes to general ecosystem balance, functioning and service and is critical to the resilience of agricultural production systems and their adaptation to climate change. Agricultural biodiversity is created, managed and nurtured by indigenous peoples, pastoralists, forest dwellers, fisherfolk and smallholder farmers, who produce most of the world's food.

26. At the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development the Ministerial Declaration adopted by Member States acknowledged that the success of the biodiversity-related targets depends on action from all sectors, such as agriculture, livestock, forestry, fishing, tourism, urbanization, manufacturing and processing industry, health, infrastructure, mining and energy development, and cannot be achieved without mainstreaming biodiversity across these sectors and by being included in national plans and local strategies.

27. Land degradation should be given global priority, particularly since global assessments of land degradation indicate that that it is worsening in many regions. About one fifth of the Earth's land surface covered by vegetation showed persistent and declining trends in productivity from 1998 to 2013. In some cases, advanced stages of land degradation are leading to desertification in dryland areas, in particular in the grasslands and rangelands. Ecosystem services to support food production are under pressure, with 33 per cent of soils moderately to highly degraded and freshwater ecosystems adversely impacted by water extraction for agriculture and other use, and by pollution.[5] An estimated 2 billion hectares — equivalent to 17 per cent of all biologically productive land — could benefit from restoration. Achieving land degradation neutrality (Sustainable Development Goal 15.3) can serve as an accelerator to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals and supports the principle of leaving no one behind.

28. The impacts of land degradation on food security mainly affect the rural poor and leave them more vulnerable to climate change, and the impacts are likely to persist over several generations. Hunger can contribute to violence by exacerbating tension and grievances. In its recent resolution 2417 (2018), the Security Council recognized the need to break the vicious cycle between armed conflict and food insecurity, while reiterating its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and, in that connection, its commitment to address conflict-induced food insecurity, including famine, in situations of armed conflict.

IV. Working together: global commitments, regional actions

29. The deliberations of global and regional bodies are progressively being aligned with the 2030 Agenda, fostering consistency and coherence of policy decisions and implementation of globally and regionally agreed priorities in line with Sustainable Development Goal targets, using globally agreed Goal indicators to measure impact. In addition, sectoral and cross-sectoral global and regional initiatives are catalysing

[5] UNEP, *A Report of the Working Group on Food Systems of the International Resources Panel*, Food Systems and Natural Resources (2016).

resources, advancing consensus across constituencies, minimizing trade-offs and sustaining national efforts on sustainable development.

30. The Committee on World Food Security represents a unique and innovative model of multi-stakeholder partnership for enhanced policy and institutional coherence. The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition provides independent evidence-based reports to the Committee on World Food Security, to inform and support policy convergence. The High Level Panel publications and reports[6] identify critical and emerging issues for food security and nutrition.[7] The reports, considered together, provide a comprehensive analysis of the importance of food security and nutrition for sustainable development, by covering related complex issues, controversies and uncertainties. They suggest common definitions, tools, methodologies, pathways and policy recommendations to structure the political debates. They demonstrate, from different perspectives, the critical importance of improving food security and nutrition for all, as both a necessary condition and a cross-cutting challenge to achieve not only Sustainable Development Goal 2, but the 2030 Agenda as a whole. An appendix contains the summaries and recommendations of the 13 reports, providing specific insights on food security and nutrition from different perspectives.

31. The Committee on World Food Security Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises, endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security in 2015, provides guidance to Governments and stakeholders on how to improve food security and nutrition in protracted crises while addressing underlying causes. To rebuild livelihoods and strengthen resilience of populations, the Framework for Action calls for policies and actions to strengthen sustainable local food systems. It fosters access to productive resources and to markets that are remunerative and beneficial to smallholders and calls for inclusive non-discriminatory and sustained access to relevant basic services such as safe drinking water and sanitation. It calls for the respect of existing rights and the ability of affected or risk populations to access and use their natural resources.

32. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security promote responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests, with respect to all forms of tenure: public, private, communal, indigenous, customary and informal. While supporting efforts towards the eradication of hunger and poverty, the Guidelines are also intended to contribute to achieving sustainable livelihoods, social stability, housing security, rural development, environmental protection and sustainable social and economic development. The Guidelines are designed to benefit all people in all countries, especially vulnerable and marginalized people. They provide a framework that States can use when developing their own strategies, policies, legislation, programmes and activities and allow Governments, civil society, the private sector and citizens to judge whether their proposed actions and the actions of others constitute acceptable practices.

33. *The Scaling Up Nutrition movement*, a multisector and multi-stakeholder platform for coordination of nutrition action, now includes 60-member countries. Some Scaling Up Nutrition countries are experiencing reductions in malnutrition. In 2016 and 2017, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Myanmar and Nigeria reported

[6] Committee on World Food Security. High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition. Available at: www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/reports/en/.

[7] Committee on World Food Security, High Level Panel of Experts, "Critical and emerging issues on food security and nutrition, 2nd ed. (2018). Available at: www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/critical-and-emerging-issues/en/.

a significant decline in the number of stunted children.[8] Some 50 Scaling Up Nutrition countries have an active multi-stakeholder platform at the national level. In 35 countries — nine more than in 2015–2016 — these platforms also work at the subnational level, supporting local actions and implementation, across sectors such as women's empowerment, agriculture, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH), health, social protection and national development. A total of 16 Scaling Up Nutrition countries have included overweight and obesity in their national policy and strategy documents, reflecting the increasing challenge that obesity poses also in developing countries.

34. The United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025), was proclaimed by the General Assembly on 1 April 2016, further to a recommendation contained in the Rome Declaration on Nutrition, adopted at the Second International Conference on Nutrition in November 2014. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Decade (A/72/829) indicates that the work programme of the Decade was drawn up by FAO and WHO through an inclusive and collaborative process, in line with the guidance given by the General Assembly in resolution 70/259, and focuses on six cross-cutting and connected action areas derived from the Framework for Action, also adopted at the Second International Conference on Nutrition. The report also presents commitments already made by Governments and other stakeholders in the context of the Decade. In resolution 72/306, the General Assembly recognized the commitments made by Governments and acknowledged the contributions of all relevant stakeholders in advancing the implementation of the Decade and called upon Governments and stakeholders to make ambitious commitments with a view to intensifying efforts and scaling up activities under the work programme for the Decade.

35. On the basis of the successful achievements of the International Year of Family Farming, 2014) the General Assembly, at its seventy-second session, proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019–2025) through resolution 72/239, to serve as a framework for countries to develop public policies and investments to support family farming and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. FAO and IFAD are developing a plan of action for the Decade through an inclusive, continuous and collaborative process, building upon and connecting the independent initiatives of Governments and their many partners. Potential synergies with the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025) are being identified, as well as with other relevant ongoing international processes and instruments.

36. FAO launched the Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture during the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in November 2016 in Marrakesh, as a call for concerted action, in response to the challenges posed by climate change, the vulnerable water resources of which agriculture is the biggest user and a growing world population that needs to be fed. The Global Framework fosters collaboration among partners for the development and deployment of responsive policies, strategies and programmes to enhance field capacity for the adaptation of agriculture to water scarcity, using context-specific approaches and processes tailored to specific circumstances and needs in support of transformational projects.

37. Without healthy soils, capable of fully providing ecosystems services, the Sustainable Development Goals will not be reached. The Global Soil Partnership was established as a mechanism to develop a strong interactive partnership and enhanced collaboration and synergy of efforts on soil among all stakeholders, from land users

[8] Progress reported from Scaling Up Nutrition countries has been validated by UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank joint malnutrition estimates group.

to policymakers. The Partnership has established nine regional and subregional soil partnerships and has contributed to successful international initiatives for awareness-raising, such as World Soil Day and the International Year of Soils. Several international and global networks have been established, such as the Global Soil Information System, the International Network of Soil Information Institutions, the International Network of Black Soils and the Global Soil Laboratory Network. In addition, annual symposiums are held on the main soil threats in order to gather state-of-the-art information and provide solutions to minimize negative impacts on soils and restore degraded soils.

38. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme has made progress since 2017 on climate-smart agriculture and assessments of the best way to mitigate the effects of climate change and, with the tools and guidelines presented in the agenda set out in *Sustaining the CAADP Momentum to Spur Agriculture Transformation*,[9] which provides guidance for determining the appropriate set of actions for economic policies to support the implementation strategy and road map to achieve the 2025 vision on the Programme. From this, the Programme initiated the fourteenth Programme partnership platform on 25 April 2018,[10] which brought together stakeholders in African agriculture and food security and sought to consolidate implementation tools and approaches in line with the realization of the added value of the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods of the African Union, with emphasis on mutual accountability mechanisms and platforms.

39. In January 2018, at the African Union summit, the first African Agricultural Transformation Scorecard was launched — a biennial review that aims to contribute to promoting mutual accountability among Member States and other significant stakeholders to the delivery of results on strategic goals and targets, including ending hunger and malnutrition, poverty reduction through inclusive development, promoting trade and building resilience. An important component of this effort is the support being provided to member States to update their national agricultural investment plans, including mainstreaming nutrition, and to the African Development Bank to develop a nutrition scorecard as part of its African Leaders for Nutrition initiative.

40. The implementation, since 2015, of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and the Eradication of Hunger 2025 promotes comprehensive public policies to reduce poverty, improve rural conditions, adapt agriculture to climate change, end food waste and face disaster risks. Similarly, the consolidation of 19 parliamentary fronts against hunger brings together more than 400 parliamentarians from different political tendencies to ensure food access as a fundamental right. A regional strategy for disaster risk management in the agriculture sector was prepared, also under the leadership of CELAC, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The strategy focuses on promoting resilience to natural events and adaptation to climate change, while increasing food security. Both programmes are aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals and rooted in the recognition of complex interlinkages between food security, poverty and climate change.

---

[9] Midrand, South Africa, African Union Commission, NEPAD Agency and Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, September 2016.

[10] African Union Commission, fourteenth Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme Partnership Platform, held from 25 to 27 April 2018. Available at: https://au.int/en/newsevents/20180425/14th-comprehensive-africa-agriculture-development-programme-partnership-platform.

V. Realizing Sustainable Development Goal 2: means of implementation

41. As identified in both the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, investments in agriculture are crucial to help improve the sector's productivity. Government expenditures, in particular, are essential to address market failure, improve equity and increase productive capacity. However, the agriculture sector continues to face a growing lag relative to other sectors in its share of government spending and contribution to total economic output. The agriculture orientation index — which measures the central government contribution to the agriculture sector compared with the sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) — fell from 0.38 in 2001 to 0.23 in 2016 worldwide, demonstrating this growing gap. For the 2014–2016 period, the agriculture orientation index was highest in East and South-East Asia (0.43) and lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean (0.15).

42. In 2016, agriculture — including fisheries and forest products — received about 2.4 per cent of the total credit disbursed by commercial banks operating globally. Given that the agriculture sector contributed about 4.2 per cent of global GDP, it appears that agricultural producers received a relatively lower share of the total credit flows to the economy. Access to formal credit is critical for farmers for purchasing inputs, such as seeds, fertilizer, plant protection materials, and animal feed. The lack of access to reasonable credit is particularly problematic for farmers who face a time lag between expenditure on crop cultivation and/or raising livestock and the realization of revenues from the sale of their products at harvest.

43. With regard to foreign aid, donors provided $12.5 billion to agriculture, forestry and fishing to developing countries. This represents only 6 per cent of all donors' sector-allocable aid, down from nearly 20 per cent in the mid-1980s.

44. Volatility in food prices can have a negative impact on food security. In 2016, 26 countries experienced high or moderately high levels of general food prices. While, in 21 countries, prices for one or more cereal products (maize, wheat, rice, sorghum/millet) were at high or moderately high levels, Sub-Saharan Africa had the largest number of countries with high levels of both food prices and cereal prices. Domestic output declines owing to drought, currency depreciation and conflict all contributed to high prices.

Investment

45. Eradicating hunger will require a significant increase in agricultural investment and, more importantly, it will require improving the quality of investment so that it benefits those that need it most. The Committee on World Food Security Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems acknowledges that the starting point for defining how responsible investment in agriculture and food systems can contribute to food security and nutrition is the recognition of and respect for human rights. The set of 10 principles applies to all types and sizes of agricultural investment, including in fisheries, forests and livestock; addresses all stakeholders and applies to all stages of the value chain; is globally applicable and includes actions to address a range of environmental, social and economic issues.

46. As a specialized United Nations agency and international financial institution, IFAD provides financing, mostly in the form of highly concessional loans, for improving the livelihoods of rural populations in developing countries to increase agricultural production and productivity and give small farmers better access to markets and services. The IFAD Strategic Framework 2016–2025 affirms the vision of inclusive rural transformation as a critical aspect of sustainable development and as the basis for the organization's work. The Framework sets three strategic objectives

to guide the work of IFAD over the next decade: to increase the productive capacity of poor rural people; to increase their benefits from market participation; and to strengthen the environmental sustainability and climate resilience of their economic activities. The IFAD Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme channels climate finance to smallholder farmers, to build their adaptive capacities to withstand, absorb and recover from climate shocks. The Programme is investing in a number of critical areas to build resilience, including systematic climate risk and vulnerability analyses.

Trade

47. Agriculture remains the dominant sector in terms of GDP, exports and employment in many developing countries. Agricultural trade can therefore contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in numerous ways. Many studies conducted in recent years have confirmed that open and non-distorted trade is a key component in food security strategies, facilitating prompt and reliable access to food produced abroad. In addition, reducing distortions such as subsidies in the agriculture sector can help ensure that farmers adapt to the needs of domestic and global markets. Through efforts to promote market integration, including through the reduction of distorting policies, poor farmers can participate more effectively in global value chains and benefit from improved incomes, while consumers benefit from access to nutritious food at affordable prices. Progress has been made in reducing subsidies that distort global agricultural markets, with agricultural export subsidies more than halved in five years, from $491 million in 2010 to less than $200 million in 2015.

48. An open, rules-based trading system is necessary to improve food security. Disciplines included in WTO agreements are an integral part of the rules-based system. The Agreement on Agriculture[11] initiated the multilateral reform process for trade in agriculture with a view to establishing a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system. It has remained the driving force for domestic policy reforms initiated by WTO members to achieve this long-term objective. The Agreement includes provisions that seek to level the playing field for trade in agriculture while ensuring that Governments have policy choices to support their agricultural sectors. It contains rules on market access, domestic support and export competition, as well as export restrictions. Its implementation has helped to contribute to a transparent, undistorted production and investment environment, which is an essential element of food security.

49. While the Agreement has contributed to improving the predictability and transparency of the global agricultural trading system, WTO members aim at strengthening further the legal framework resulting from the Agreement reform process through the ongoing agriculture negotiations. By lowering trade barriers, including trade-distorting subsidies, successful negotiations should facilitate a more favourable global environment for food security and sustainable agriculture, making food supplies more abundant and affordable.

50. Sustainable Development Goal 2 includes a target that explicitly concerns the removal of agricultural export subsidies. Sustainable Development Goal target 2.b urges countries to correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round. At the tenth WTO Ministerial Conference, held in Nairobi in 2015, WTO members delivered a major part of that target by adopting the Ministerial Decision on Export Competition.[12] The

[11] Available at: www.wto.org/English/docs_e/legal_e/14-ag_01_e.htm.

[12] WT/L/980. Available at: www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc10_e/l980_e.htm.

decision eliminates agricultural export subsidies and sets out new rules for export credits, international food aid and exporting state trading enterprises. By ensuring that countries will no longer be able to resort to trade-distorting export subsidies and measures of equivalent effect, the decision will help to level the playing field in agriculture, aiding farmers in many developing and least developed countries.

51. Export subsidy outlays have been following a decreasing trend in the last 15 years to reach record low levels at less than $200 million annually. Because of the WTO Ministerial Decision on Export Competition, these residual export subsidies will be progressively phased out and will not reappear in the future.

52. The Ministerial Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries [13] includes various mechanisms for international cooperation and collaboration towards, inter alia, enhancing agricultural productivity and food security with special attention to least developed countries and net-food importing developing countries.

South-South and triangular cooperation

53. In the context of the changing face of hunger, brokering South-South and triangular cooperation is an effective means to advance country-led progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2. South-South cooperation is critical for accessing and mobilizing the expertise, technologies and financial resources that already exist in developing countries. In order to reach the remaining 815 million people affected by chronic food deprivation worldwide, the knowledge and innovations from the Global South are indispensable.

54. Stronger partnerships are imperative to scale up progress against Sustainable Development Goal 2. South-South and Triangular Cooperation emerges as particularly important to share innovation and knowledge to adapt and scale up sustainable solutions to the problems that rural people are facing in different contexts across the world. IFAD recently established a $10 million facility for South-South and Triangular Cooperation and launched a rural solutions portal for documenting, sharing and adapting successful experiences in improving the food security, productivity and incomes of rural people.[14]

55. While significant progress has been achieved to promote South-South and triangular cooperation in agriculture, food security and nutrition, more needs to be done. As countries need to find new ways to bridge the development-humanitarian-peace nexus in their individual context, South-South and Triangular Cooperation is an effective means to support countries in meeting not only their longer-term development needs but also their humanitarian needs. There are key opportunities for the international community and the United Nations system, for example, to focus stronger on brokering South-South opportunities in areas such as nutrition, social protection and safety nets, emergency preparedness and response, food security analysis and connecting smallholder farmers to markets.

56. Driven by rising country demand, WFP, as well as FAO and IFAD in their Rome-Based United Nations partnership, have stepped up their individual and joint approaches to brokering South-South and triangular cooperation with government for progress on Sustainable Development Goal 2. Driven by rising country demand, 74 per cent of WFP country Offices are actively engaged in supporting host Governments to tap into South-South opportunities, guided by the WFP 2015 Policy for South-South and triangular cooperation — a significant increase from 48 per cent

[13] Available at: www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/35-dag_e.htm.

[14] Available at: https://ruralsolutionsportal.org/.

in 2014. In support of these efforts, the International Conference on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, on the theme "Leveraging Innovations from the Global South to Support Rural Transformation" was held in Brasilia on 20 and 21 November 2017.

Science, technology and innovation

57. Cash-based transfers are widely recognized as one of the most significant areas of innovation in humanitarian assistance, with huge potential to meet more needs, more efficiently and more effectively. However, innovation requires an appetite for risk (with the accompanying possibility of failure) on the part of implementing agencies and donors. Innovation and technological advances have been central to the growth of cash-based programming, such as the rapid expansion of mobile money, the use of biometrics and more recent attempts to utilize blockchain technology and digital identities. Over the coming years there will be a need for greater focus on enhancing organizational capacity in terms of structures, systems, policies and procedures; enhancing human resource capacity; building capacity of local actors; development of common tools and standards; improving the quality of cash-based transfer programming; strengthening the evidence base; and strengthening the coordination of cash-based transfers.

58. Precision farming (also known as precision agriculture, precision agronomy, or soil- or site-specific farming) refers to the effort to improve farm (and aquaculture, fishery and forest management) practices through the use of a variable combination of smart technologies, including remote sensors, drones with advanced optics, applications such as the normalized difference vegetation index embedded in machinery and equipment, linked through the Internet of things (including soils, plants and animals, e.g., the "Internet of cows") and guided by geo-referencing systems such as satellite-based global positioning systems and geographic information systems.

59. While the visible components of precision farming — satellite-guided tractors, drones and increasingly sophisticated sensors — have attracted the most attention in the press, the underlying and driving technology behind precision farming is data analytics, enabled by the availability of ever cheaper, more portable and more powerful computational power, and powered by algorithmic learning, artificial intelligence engines and deep learning.

60. Precision farming first emerged as an innovation particularly suited to improving the natural resource and input efficiency of large-scale monocropping of high-yield, genetically uniform crops, with better timed and targeted, and hence reduced, use of water, chemical fertilizers, synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and with sustainability and farm profitability both improved. Given this initial incarnation, precision farming would seem to have little relevance to the needs of family farmers working on small plots, with very low capital or input intensity. However, precision agriculture available to family farmers could increase their capacity to improve agriculture outputs (and obtain access to data and information in a timely manner), mainstream and monitor more agroecological practices and support an inclusive, more sustainable agricultural transformation.

61. The costs of access to component technologies and systems have declined dramatically, and working systems are available in open source versions that are being adapted to local needs. User interfaces can be localized, and farmer ownership of data can be secured. Developing the potential of precision farming analytics will require that farmers themselves be engaged in new ways. The next step in precision farming is to improve farm management practices beyond current efficiency thresholds by enabling computers to gather sufficient data over time to allow artificial intelligence to recognize, accurately predict and help farmers adapt efficiently to the full range of

possible environmental conditions prevailing at any given moment in order to achieve their goal of a better harvest.

62. The difficulty is that a purely data-driven approach cannot cope with the immense variability and continuous change in farm conditions. The sheer proliferation of data sources and flows presents its own problems: the deluge of data collected from remote sensors changes rapidly in multiple dimensions throughout the season; as a result, it is non-stationary, unstructured, heterogeneous and highly sensitive to the zone, soil, weather and pests, among many other uncontrollable factors.[15] Systems theories that utilize general models of photosynthesis and crop growth are available from research and can be used to generate more robust processing algorithms. However, to become truly efficient in ways that increase resilience and achieve next generation yield, sustainability and income (profitability) improvements, researchers will need to be paired directly with farmers who can work together to adapt the systems, in order to understand local ecologies more holistically and completely.

63. Developing appropriate packages of software and equipment to ease implementation and sustain machine-assisted learning for building both the science and practice of agroecology may prove critical to its wider adoption at production level. At the same time, it is increasingly recognized by leading advocates of the agroecological approach that a focus on the farm level only undermines the overall effectiveness of the approach. To become truly transformative, it is vital that agroecological principles and approaches also operate at the territorial and even food systems levels.[16]

64. For policy purposes, precision farming data gathering and analysis can provide the needed evidence base to guide government support. Data can be captured from multiple farms at territorial level and in multiple territories through computing grids. This type of computer-assisted collaboration can make available highly granular data that can be used to strengthen coordination and planning for the sustainable use of natural resources and to improve research, learning and knowledge-sharing. This digital revolution can also aid in validation and certification of good sustainability practices.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

65. With current trends, hunger will not be eradicated by 2030. Urgent action is needed to recover momentum and accelerate efforts for hunger eradication, good nutrition and sustainable agriculture and food systems.

66. With an increased number of countries facing protracted crisis, there is also an urgent need to scale up collaboration on resilience across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in order to simultaneously meet immediate needs in crisis contexts and address the underlying causes of food insecurity, through stronger partnerships in the form of joint assessments, joint planning, joint programming and better data sharing initiatives. Innovative tools for emergency response built around information and communications technology and GPS data can strengthen community

[15] Naira Hovakimyan, "Digital agriculture needs a broad community of contributors to succeed", AgFunderNews, 31 August 2017.

[16] C. Francis and others, "Agroecology: the ecology of food systems", *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, vol. 22, No. 3 (2003; published online 2008); Manuel González de Molina, "Agroecology and politics. How to get sustainability? About the necessity for a political agroecology", *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, vol. 37, No. 1 (2013).

resilience to climate and other shocks and contribute to the long-term health of social and economic systems that are the foundation for lasting solutions to world hunger.

67. Small-scale food producers, family farmers and other actors in agriculture and food systems play a key role in promoting food security and nutrition, and the positive impact of their empowerment and engagement in national processes extends to gender equality, community and family health and nutrition, the sustainability of water management and energy and to inclusive economic growth, the sustainability of human settlements, sustainable consumption and production, increased climate resilience, sustainable management and use of terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity. Collaboration among stakeholders across the rural urban continuum, as well as territorial approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems, can ensure achievement of food security in both urban and rural areas.

68. Sustainable and inclusive societies can be brought about only through policy, investment and governance frameworks that adopt people-centred, rights-based holistic and multi-stakeholder approaches in which all voices are heard — including those of rural people, women, youth and smallholder farmers. Only in this way is it possible to address systemic inequalities, including unequal access to nutritious food — for example between rural and urban areas, between women and men and between smallholder farmers and more powerful actors across agrifood value chains.[17]

69. Consistent and specific actions and governance arrangements at all levels can be put into effect to make national and local actions efficient, to boost learning processes and stimulate synergies, to address trade-offs and to implement risk prevention mechanisms. Working alongside local institutions such as women's groups and water-user groups, prioritizing grassroots, and even household-level interventions, offers the most scope for addressing rural actors' rights.

70. Investing in nutrition through agriculture is not only socially responsible, but also sound development policy and good economics. Its impact is multigenerational, allowing children to reach their full physical and intellectual potential, so that they can grow into healthy adults and lift themselves out of poverty. It is important that all understand the importance of a multisectoral approach.

71. Enabling policies and targeted investments are required for smallholders and other actors across agrifood value chains to provide access to financial services, markets, training and risk management tools, which represent solid returns on investments in terms of local improvements in food availability, access and nutrition outcomes.

72. The scientific community, in partnership with the private sector and other actors, can strengthen capacity for data collection in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal indicators, including the provision of baselines, which are essential for designing, implementing and monitoring adapted pathways and solutions at different scales.

73. It is recommended that Governments work together with relevant actors as follows:

(a) Place agricultural and rural development policies and programmes at the centre of national development strategies aimed at poverty reduction and food security enhancement;

(b) Create opportunities beyond the farm and across the agricultural value chain, including all relevant actors that work within sustainable food systems;

[17] See: www.ifad.org/web/knowledge/publication/asset/40253342.

(c) Provide public goods and services to enable businesses to participate in the food system;

(d) Ensure that small-scale producers can tap into the potential provided by rapidly increasing urban food demand;

(e) Invest in agriculture, build resilience within societies, and strengthen the conservation and management of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems to reduce human suffering, decrease humanitarian needs and costs and allow for a more targeted allocation of limited resources and secure development gains ahead of future shocks;

(f) Leverage the untapped potential of food systems through agro-industrial development focused on the employment of women and youth to boost productivity and incomes on small-scale farms and create off-farm employment through the development of up- and downstream agriculture services and food value chain development to help accelerate rural poverty reduction and contribute to addressing urban poverty and food insecurity;

(g) Support institutional and policy measures and incentives for the mobilization of responsible investments in agriculture and food systems;

(h) Provide smallholder family farmers with secure access to land and other productive resources and services, including water and credit;

(i) Prioritize coordination with high-level policy approaches to advance policy mechanisms such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security and inclusive models of public-private-producer partnerships;

(j) Apply a nutritional lens to the design and implementation of investments in agriculture, food systems and rural development, which can optimize contributions to improving nutrition.

United Nations A/73/294

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 August 2018

Original: English

Seventy-third session
Item 29 of the provisional agenda*
Advancement of women

Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/170, provides information on measures taken by Member States and activities carried out within the United Nations system to address violence against women and girls, in particular sexual harassment as a form of violence against women. The report includes conclusions and specific recommendations for future action.

* A/73/150.

18-12334 (E) 100918

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 71/170, the General Assembly recognized that violence against women and girls was an impediment to their enjoyment of all human rights and urged Member States to continue to adopt a more comprehensive approach to addressing it in both public and private spheres.

2. The present report is based on research and information available in the Global Database on Violence against Women,[1] and the Inventory on United Nations Activities to End Violence against Women,[2] both of which are administered by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), as well as information received from Member States and entities of the United Nations. Following the previous report of the Secretary-General on the issue (A/71/219), the present report covers the period from 18 June 2016 to 30 June 2018.

3. Given the recent unprecedented mobilization against sexual harassment and assault, in particular in the world of work, and the wave of women speaking out on the issue, as well as gaps in responses to effectively address those forms of violence, the present report places a special focus on the issue of sexual harassment. In line with the previous report, which highlighted domestic violence and violence against women in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, the focus of the present report is to effectively bridge existing knowledge gaps and cover emerging issues. The focused discussion in the present report is presented with analysis and information to address all forms of violence against women and girls. It highlights gender inequality as a root cause, State responsibility to prevent and respond, and efforts, including within the United Nations system, to address sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. The Secretary-General has expressed his strong commitment to zero tolerance of such violence and to addressing its root causes through a series of concrete measures outlined herein.

II. Global and regional normative developments

4. In the past two years, global norms on the elimination of violence against women and girls have been advanced by a number of United Nations bodies.

5. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Heads of State or Government and High Representatives called for the elimination of all forms of violence against women. In the New Urban Agenda, Member States committed to ensuring that public spaces and streets were free from sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and called for the design of safe transport in a gender-sensitive manner.

6. At its sixty-first session, the Commission on the Status of Women strongly condemned violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment, highlighting the negative impact on women's enjoyment of their rights in relation to work, and adopted a specific resolution on addressing sexual harassment in the workplace (see E/2017/27-E/CN.6/2017/21). That commitment was reiterated by the Commission at its sixty-second session, with particular attention given to women and girls living in rural areas, and with a focus on ending cyberbullying and cyberstalking (see E/2018/27-E/CN.6/2018/20). Sexual harassment has also been recently addressed in the context of violence against women in politics (see General Assembly

[1] See http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en.

[2] See http://evaw-un-inventory.unwomen.org/en.

resolution 72/278) and in digital contexts (see Human Rights Council resolution 38/5).

7. Another recent development has been the adoption by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of its general recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (CEDAW/C/GC/35), in which the Committee acknowledged that gender-based violence against women could occur in all spaces and spheres of human interaction, including public spaces, the workplace, areas dedicated to leisure and technology-mediated settings.

8. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences continued to examine related critical issues, including the role of technological advancements in changing the nature of violence against women and girls, and has called upon Governments to ensure that regulatory frameworks are aligned with human rights instruments (see A/HRC/38/47).

9. Another important normative development pertains to a new global standard on violence and harassment in the world of work. A relevant item has been placed on the agenda of the 108th session of the International Labour Conference, to be held in June 2019, with a view to adopting a convention on the issue, to be supplemented by a recommendation. Adherence to such a standard would expand obligations to address violence and harassment in the world of work, including sexual harassment and domestic violence.

III. Emerging issues in the elimination of violence against women and girls

A. Increasing global focus on sexual harassment and sexual violence: moving from attention to action

10. A significant development in the last 18 months has been increasing global attention and mobilization around sexual harassment and sexual violence. The growth of the "#MeToo", "#TimesUp", "#BalanceTonPorc" "#NiUnaMenos" and "HollaBack!" movements, among other global and national solidarity movements, has resulted in an unprecedented number of women from different walks of life and regions of the world speaking out about violence against women and girls, in particular sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence.[3] Those movements, building on decades of advocacy by women's movements around the world, have opened up new spaces, in particular through media and social media, for women's voices and experiences to be heard. The unprecedented attention to systemic sexual harassment and sexual violence has the potential to culminate in a tipping point, whereby such violations would no longer accepted as the norm and perpetrators would be held to account. To address it effectively, actions need to focus on addressing the unequal power relations between men and women that permeate all institutions. The United Nations, for example, has adopted measures to achieve gender parity, in addition to strengthening its policies with respect to sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse.

11. Sexual harassment is ubiquitous and experienced by women in a range of settings, including the workplace, educational institution and public spaces, both offline and online. Sexual harassment is meted out through technology, occurs on

[3] Purna Sen, "Women are uniting against sexual violence — and we won't be stopped", *The Guardian*, 6 July 2018. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jul/06/women-sexual-violence-harassment.

streets and at social and cultural events, and takes place in and around workplaces, schools, public transportation, recreational spaces, marketplaces and water distribution sites. Despite limited global data, some studies have revealed the alarming scale and extent of the problem. A study of 42,000 people in the European Union found that every second woman (55 per cent) had experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, and one in five women (21 per cent) had experienced it in the 12 months preceding the survey. Among women who had experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, 32 per cent indicated that the perpetrator had been someone that they had come in contact with in the employment context, such as a colleague, a boss or a customer.[4]

12. Studies conducted at the national and local levels have also highlighted alarming rates of sexual harassment in a range of settings. An Australian survey of over 30,000 university students found that 32 per cent of female students had been sexually harassed at university, including while travelling to university, compared to 17 per cent of male students.[5]

13. International legal and policy frameworks reflect the recognition of sexual harassment as a form of discrimination against women and a violation of human rights, and a growing number of laws are addressing the phenomenon. However, sexual harassment has for too long been normalized, justified and made invisible as an inevitable part of life. Legal frameworks on sexual harassment still remain inadequate and uneven across countries, with particularly limited protection against sexual harassment in public spaces. Systems put in place to address sexual harassment have been insufficient to enable women to come forward and seek justice. Women do not report sexual harassment for various reasons, including for fear of reprisal or concerns that the issue will be dealt with ineffectively, ignored or covered up. That has resulted in a culture of victim-blaming and impunity for perpetrators.

14. The global movements that have called out sexual harassment and assault on a mass scale have set new expectations for accountability and action. In cases where organizations do not take decisive action, increasing mobilization will continue to demand change. There is now an opportunity for the stories shared by women to shift the focus from the believability of victims to the accountability of perpetrators and the action of duty bearers, including Governments and employers.

B. The continuum of violence against women and girls

15. One of the most significant realizations emerging from the various solidarity movements is that, rather than limited to being a series of individual incidents perpetrated by outliers, violence against women and girls is systemic in nature, occurring across a range of settings and taking a multiplicity of forms. That realization has exposed unequal power relations between women and men as the root cause, which is reinforced by harmful masculinities that perpetuate male domination, the assumption of sexual entitlement and the expectation of women's subservience. Gender inequality is deeply embedded in the structures and institutions that organize and reinforce an unequal distribution of economic, social and political power and resources between women and men. Gender inequality is also reinforced by discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes that dictate the conduct, roles, interests and contributions expected from women and men in public and private life, and by the practices, behaviours and daily actions that reinforce men's power and

[4] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Violence against Women: an EU-wide Survey — Main Results* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015).

[5] Australian Human Rights Commission, *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities* (Sydney, Australia, 2017).

normalize disrespect towards women. The fact that women are less likely to be represented in public decision-making roles sends a message about the value of women's voices and entrenches ideas regarding men's control and power over decisions and resources.

16. Violence experienced by women and girls takes multiple forms that may in fact reinforce each other and overlap. Available comparable data from 87 countries for the period 2000–2016 show that, worldwide, an average of 19 per cent of women and girls 15 to 49 years of age had experienced physical and/or sexual violence committed by an intimate partner in the past 12 months. Violence against women in its gravest forms can be lethal, with femicide being a global phenomenon.

17. Understanding violence against women and girls as a continuum recognizes the commonalities and connections between manifestations of violence in different contexts.[6] All forms of sexual violence against women and girls, including rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, are rooted in male domination, entitlement, power and control. They all involve coercion, force, intimidation and threats that deny a person's dignity.

18. Sexual harassment, as one form of violence against women, occurs within the context of inequality and is part of a continuum of violence. It is enabled by women's unequal economic status, economic insecurity and a lack of equal representation and participation, in particular in leadership positions, across different sectors. While men can be victims of sexual harassment and other forms of violence too, the vast majority of cases involve men perpetrating violence and harassment against women. Whether sexual harassment occurs at work, in school or in public spaces, all forms of violence and harassment are directly or indirectly used to maintain and reinforce patriarchal norms, roles and structures and an unequal power relationship between women and men. The concept of a continuum of violence draws the connection between the "horrific" and the "everyday" experiences of violence and abuse against women and girls. The concept is important for understanding sexual harassment, given that there is often a tendency to focus on the more extreme forms of violence and neglect or minimize the everyday experiences of abuse and harassment that can have a deeply corrosive and harmful effect on women's lives.[7]

19. For women and girls subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality, the experience of sexual harassment and sexual violence can be compounded by a broader context of exclusion and discrimination. For example, for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons, experiences of sexual harassment can be bound up in harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity, where women are not only harassed on the basis of their gender, but also for transgressing expected gender identities and roles. Some groups of women, for example migrant women, are often subjected to sexual harassment that is also fuelled by racist stereotypes about the sexual roles and subservience of particular groups.

20. Addressing sexual harassment requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes the continuum of violence against women and girls and the different settings in which it occurs, with comprehensive laws that are properly enforced, and preventative measures to shift gender social norms, expectations and behaviours, in particular in respect of harmful masculinities, assumed male sexual entitlement, control and dominance, and women's expected sexual subservience. In order to achieve change, it is vital to engage men and boys in efforts to address sexual harassment, including with respect to the equal sharing of responsibilities in different

[6] Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

[7] Liz Kelly and Nicole Westmarland, "Naming and defining 'domestic violence': lessons from research with violent men", *Feminist Review*, vol. 112, No. 1 (February 2016).

areas, such as child-rearing and parenting, domestic work and caregiving. Evidence shows that men with more gender-equitable attitudes are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence.[8]

C. Sexual harassment in the world of work

21. In the world of work, sexual harassment occurs in the private and public sectors, across all industries and in the formal and informal economies. The costs of sexual harassment and sexual violence in the world of work are high for the individuals affected, for the organizations in which sexual harassment or sexual violence occurs, and for the public and tax payers, through social costs and the costs of services to address the consequences. For individuals, sexual harassment has a detrimental impact on health and well-being, employment, future work prospects and economic opportunities.[9] There is limited global data on the specific impact of sexual harassment in the workplace. However, according to one survey by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, workers who had experienced physical violence were three times more likely to experience depression and twice as likely to report stress. After being bullied or harassed, workers were four times more likely to experience depression, three times more likely to report problems sleeping and twice as likely to report stress.[10] Speaking out on sexual harassment can also be costly for individuals, as it may result in job loss or reduced earnings, in particular for service workers who may depend on tips for their earnings.[11]

22. The costs of sexual harassment to organizations are also very high, including increased turnover and absenteeism, lower individual and group productivity, loss of managerial time to investigate complaints, and legal expenses, including litigation costs and the payment of damages to victims.[12] While there is very little up-to-date research on the subject, according to a survey of 160 corporations in the United States, a typical Fortune 500 company with 23,750 employees lost $6.7 million a year because of absenteeism, low productivity and staff turnover as a result of sexual harassment.[13] Data from the joint the Better Work Programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) suggest that, where sexual harassment is more prevalent, average business profits are negatively impacted.[14]

23. Changing work cultures is critical to ending sexual harassment. Lessons from relevant initiatives to change work cultures (for example, with regard to workplace safety) point to the potential of a combination of measures, including regulation, to effectively prevent and respond to sexual harassment. A comprehensive approach addressing sexual harassment in the workplace requires: specific laws that set out the obligations and responsibilities of employers and their effective enforcement;

---

[8] Gary Barker and others, "Evolving men: initial results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey" (Washington, DC, International Centre for Research on Women; Rio de Janeiro, Instituo Promundo, 2011).

[9] International Labour Organization (ILO), "Background paper for discussion at the Meeting of Experts on Violence against Women and Men in the World of Work (3–6 October 2016)".

[10] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Physical and Psychological Violence at the Workplace* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2013).

[11] ILO, *Ending Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2017). Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_553577.pdf.

[12] Joni Hersch, "Sexual harassment in the workplace" (Institute for the Study of Labour, 2015).

[13] Robert H. Faley and others, "Estimating the organizational costs of sexual harassment: the case of the U.S. Army", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, vol. 13, No. 4 (December 1999).

[14] ILO, *Ending Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work*.

unequivocal leadership and policies stating zero tolerance for sexual harassment and assault; enabling reporting mechanisms; timely and decisive action in response to sexual harassment; comprehensive support for victims; training and education; bystander intervention training; and broader gender equality measures. Indeed, a meta-analysis of the impact of sexual harassment on organizations showed that organizational tolerance is the single most important factor in whether sexual harassment occurs in a workplace.[15]

D. Technology and violence against women and girls

24. The magnitude and impact of technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, its impunity, lack of remedies and weak prevention measures are deeply concerning. Although global data are not available, a study of the European Union revealed that 1 in 10 women there had experienced cyberharassment since the age of 15, with the risk being highest among young women 18 to 29 years of age.

25. Rapid advances in technology, with their wide reach and accessibility, have provided another avenue through which sexual harassment and sexual assault are being perpetrated. The continuum of sexual harassment and sexual assault also extends both offline and online. While the forms of violence perpetrated through the use of information and communications technologies are not necessarily new, technological advances have transformed the nature and extent of and the harm caused by that violence. The transformation has been facilitated by the ever-faster pace at which information spreads, the ability to perpetrate harassment and violence from a distance, the increased connectivity between perpetrators online and the use of anonymous profiles.

26. Sexual harassment facilitated by technology takes many different forms and is defined as unwanted verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature online with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (see A/HRC/38/47). It may involve the non-consensual dissemination of sexualized images, the communication of sexual threats, or unwanted advances. Some specific forms of online harassment have emerged in recent years, including "trolling", online stalking and online mobbing. Perpetrators of online sexual harassment can be either known, such as colleagues, neighbours, partners or ex-partners, or unknown.

27. Some groups of women are particularly vulnerable to technology-facilitated sexual harassment, such as journalists, women in politics, women human rights defenders, bloggers, young women and women belonging to particularly marginalized groups. Women in public life are often sexually harassed because of their public roles and advocacy for women's human rights and gender equality. The intimidation and threats to which they are subjected are a form of violence against women and also are a form of backlash against women's increasing public participation.

28. The harms caused by sexual harassment, abuse and violence facilitated by technology are severe, in particular the psychological harm due to their scale and repetitive nature. It may result in depression, anxiety and self-harm and may cause women to reduce their online presence or to censor themselves. Online sexual harassment can be an extension of offline sexual harassment, with economic, health and social consequences for women.

[15] Chelsea R. Willness, Piers Steel and Kibeom Lee, "A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of workplace sexual harassment", *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 60, No. 1 (February 2007).

29. Those same technological advances can, however, also provide new opportunities for movement building and for women's mobilization and action against sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women. Technology enables women to connect and speak out about their experiences, as evidenced by the recent movements focused on sexual harassment and sexual violence.

30. There is a need for stronger action from Member States to prevent and eliminate online violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment. Doing so will require the exercise of due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence that are committed through the use of technology, and an increased focus on regulation and prevention efforts, to ensure that women enjoy the right to be free from sexual harassment and from all forms of violence, both offline and online.

IV. Actions taken by Member States and the United Nations system to eliminate violence against women and girls, in particular sexual harassment

31. The following sections provide an overview of recent developments and actions taken by Member States[16] and the United Nations to address violence against women, with a focus on sexual harassment, highlighting promising approaches, challenges and gaps. While the focus of the present report remains on sexual harassment, information is also provided on action taken to address violence against women and girls more broadly.

32. A comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women and girls, supported by adequate financial resources, remains essential. The recently launched Spotlight Initiative of the United Nations and the European Union,[17] supported by an initial investment by the European Union of 500 million euros, galvanizes such a comprehensive approach and encompasses measures in the areas of laws and policies, prevention, services and data collection to address violence against women and girls and other harmful practices. The initiative aims to strengthen collaboration among different actors, including national Governments and civil society, and to demonstrate that interventions addressing gender inequality and violence against women, when adequately funded, effectively coordinated and in support of comprehensive programmes, can have an impact on the realization of all Sustainable Development Goals.

A. Comprehensive laws and women's access to justice

33. Over the past three decades, while countries have increasingly introduced laws to address violence against women and girls, significant gaps and inadequacies remain, leaving women unprotected from various forms of violence in many contexts. A key challenge is the poor enforcement of such laws, owing to limited political will,

[16] Submissions were received from the following Member States: Andorra, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Myanmar, New Zealand, Nigeria, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

[17] See http://www.un.org/en/spotlight-initiative/index.shtml.

poor provision of and access to legal services, and persistent stigma around such violence, which often prevents women from seeking justice (see E/CN.6/2015/3).

34. A World Bank study of legislation on violence against women in 189 economies found that, between 2016 and 2018, 13 countries had reformed laws to strengthen protections in that area. For example, Ecuador and Tunisia introduced comprehensive laws to address multiple forms of violence against women across public and private settings. Other countries strengthened legislation on domestic violence by expanding the scope of protection (Kenya), or by extending it to cover various forms and defining it as a criminal offence (Mongolia). Latvia improved protection orders and the prosecution of perpetrators. Despite that progress, 45 economies remain without specific legislation on domestic violence. Some 72 countries do not have clear criminal penalties for domestic violence. In 12 countries, perpetrators of rape are exempt from charges if they marry the victim.

35. With regard to sexual harassment specifically, although there has been progress in enacting laws to address sexual harassment in the workplace, women still remain unprotected by law in other spheres such as education and public spaces. Of 189 countries, 35 do not have legislation on sexual harassment; 59 do not have legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace; 123 do not have legislation on sexual harassment in education; and 157 do not have legislation on sexual harassment in public spaces.[18] Those data suggest that the coverage of laws remains uneven and limited, with women and girls unprotected in many spheres of life, leaving them particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment.

36. Sexual harassment provisions are often found in criminal codes, anti-discrimination statutes, workplace health and safety laws, as well as labour legislation. While there is no internationally agreed definition, key elements of sexual harassment include the concepts of "unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature", "the violation of dignity of a person", and the effect of creating an "intimidating, hostile, humiliating, degrading or offensive environment".[19] Good practices in laws addressing sexual harassment recognize sexual harassment as a form of discrimination and cover multiple spheres such as public spaces, education, employment, including formal and informal sectors, and in the provision of goods and services. Laws should reflect the recognition that sexual harassment can occur in the context of both vertical and horizontal power relationships and between workers, regardless of their contract type or status, and that perpetrators can be third parties or clients.[20]

37. Several countries have recently introduced or strengthened legislation to improve protection against sexual harassment. The improvements include the passage of new legislation specifically addressing sexual harassment (Barbados), the revision of criminal laws to include provisions on sexual harassment (Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany and Haiti) and the inclusion of provisions on sexual harassment within human rights, anti-discrimination or labour laws (Cambodia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Lithuania). Limited information was provided, however, on the implementation or enforcement of those laws. A good practice in the formulation of sexual harassment laws is to include an explicit requirement that employers and educational institutions take steps to prevent sexual harassment and to include provisions that stipulate the liability of employers in sexual

[18] World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC, 2018). Available at http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/992115242369829 58/WBL-Key-Findings-Web-FINAL-2.pdf.

[19] ILO and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Handbook on promising practices in preventing and ending violence and harassment against women in the world of work" (forthcoming).

[20] UN-Women, "Handbook for legislation on violence against women" (2012).

harassment cases where they have not taken reasonable steps to prevent it (Canada and Lithuania). Other countries are considering draft legislation on sexual harassment (Eswatini, Indonesia, Jamaica, Lebanon, Mali and Saudi Arabia). Recognizing the need to expand protection against sexual harassment to digital settings, several countries have also enacted legislation to protect against sexual harassment and abuse online (Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Kenya, Republic of Korea and United Arab Emirates).

38. The gap in legal protection against sexual harassment in public spaces remains stark. There are, however, examples of good practices with respect to laws at the national and city levels, which have often been developed and/or implemented with the support of UN-Women.[21] For example a city law addressing sexual harassment in public spaces in Brussels was followed by the adoption a national law that penalizes sexual harassment in public spaces throughout Belgium.[22] Similarly, city-level laws have also recently been adopted in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador and Philippines.[23] A city law in Buenos Aires contains a particularly promising provision that requires the implementation of prevention measures such as educational campaigns.[24] Those efforts should be expanded across cities and countries to address the gaps in related legal protections.

39. Women experience significant barriers to reporting sexual harassment. Therefore, a critical component of any law addressing sexual harassment should be the provision of criminal, civil and administrative remedies, thereby giving victims options on how they wish to pursue a complaint and seek compensation.[25] There was very limited information provided by countries on the remedies available in sexual harassment complaint processes. A few countries reported on measures to increase women's access to justice through either improving court processes to support victims (Lithuania and Sierra Leone), improving complaint processes (Mexico), or the provision of legal support (Cambodia and Republic of Korea).

40. Many countries have independent equality bodies, ombudspersons or national human rights institutions that review complaints of sexual harassment. Some countries such as Denmark have established good practices that involve public engagement and inquiry, allowing for individuals to share their experiences of sexual harassment, with a view to strengthening responses, legislation and policy reform. The Australian Human Rights Commission recently announced a large-scale national inquiry into sexual harassment in the workplace.

41. Recognizing the impact of technology on violence against women, including sexual harassment, a few countries have also recently established specific roles to monitor cybercrimes and violence and abuse that take place online (Austria) or have introduced specific policies to address the issue (Denmark). Given the ubiquitous nature of sexual harassment and abuse online, more focus is needed on legal reform in this area.

42. Under the leadership of the Secretary-General,[26] the United Nations is addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment committed by staff and partner entities. The Secretary-General has introduced a four-pronged strategy to

[21] UN-Women, "Safe cities and safe public spaces: global results report" (2017). Available at http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/safe-cities-and-safe-public-spaces-global-results-report.

[22] UN-Women, "Guidance note: legislation on sexual harassment in public spaces" (forthcoming).

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC, 2018).

[26] See www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2018-02-02/secretary-generals-remarks-press-stakeout.

prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse system-wide, which is focused on prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims, ending impunity, engaging with civil society and external partners, and improving strategic communication for education and transparency. Key initiatives include the appointment of the Victims' Rights Advocate and Field Victims' Rights Advocates; the development of protocols on the provision of assistance to victims; the establishment of accountability for credibly investigating all allegations; a tool for screening prior to recruitment; the creation of a circle of leadership on the issue composed of Heads of State or Government; and the establishment of a voluntary compact between the United Nations and Member States regarding measures to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

43. In operationalizing his zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment, the Secretary-General established a Chief Executives Board (CEB) task force on addressing sexual harassment, comprised of senior representatives across the system, to focus on prevention and response. The task force has reached agreement on a common definition of sexual harassment and on common policy principles. It is also seeking to improve reporting and victim support mechanisms across the United Nations system. In June 2018, a system-wide database was launched to prevent the hiring of individuals whose previous employment had been terminated on grounds of sexual harassment. The United Nations Secretariat has instituted fast track procedures for receiving, processing and addressing complaints and recruited specialized investigators. The Secretariat also established a 24/7 helpline. Complaints of sexual harassment are being handled as "category 1" matters to be investigated by specialized investigators in the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The whistle-blower policy has been strengthened, as has the policy on investigations and disciplinary matters. A survey of United Nations personnel will be conducted to better understand prevalence and reporting patterns. In addition, the Secretary-General's system-wide strategy on gender parity has contributed to combating sexual harassment by addressing the unequal gender power relations that underpin and enable sexual harassment.

44. In addition to measures on sexual harassment, countries, often with the support of the United Nations system, have continued to adopt or strengthen laws to address different forms of violence against women and have revised policy frameworks such as national action plans. Some countries have reviewed legislation with a view to ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Liechtenstein, Romania and Switzerland). With respect to measures to address different forms of violence, particularly promising approaches include the coordination and alignment of national action plans on violence against women with plans at the subnational level (Argentina), legislative provisions for the prevention of violence against women (Ukraine) and the targeting of policies to address the needs of particularly marginalized groups such as indigenous women (Colombia and Honduras), adolescent girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals (El Salvador), and Afrodescent communities (Honduras), in line with the commitment set out in the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. Despite those examples, efforts to use legal and policy measures to reach women and girls who have been left behind remain limited.

B. Preventing violence against and harassment of women and girls

45. Countries are increasingly recognizing the importance of investing in prevention by introducing measures such as awareness-raising campaigns, increasing the engagement of men, boys and community leaders, and community mobilization programmes (Argentina, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Chile, Honduras, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Togo, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom of

Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Only a few countries reported efforts to prevent violence against women by addressing gender inequality as a root cause and by transforming gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms (Cambodia, Germany and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)). Recognizing the important role that the media plays in perpetuating gender stereotypes, which can normalize violence against women and girls, El Salvador has established an observatory for the media with a view to eliminating gender stereotypes and sexist advertising.

46. Very few countries have introduced properly resourced, long-term and coordinated prevention strategies, with the vast majority reporting only short-term activities. Only one country reported on a comprehensive prevention strategy grounded in an evidence-based approach (Cambodia), and only one country reported on efforts to reach marginalized groups (Mauritania). Promising practices include frameworks that promote a coordinated and multisectoral approach to tackling gender inequality as a root cause of violence, along with efforts to transform gender norms and to address the underlying factors operating at the various levels, including intersecting forms of discrimination.[27]

47. The evidence on what works to prevent sexual harassment in different settings is limited but growing. Many of the strategies that are effective in preventing other forms of violence against women can also be extended to prevent sexual harassment. In the context of the workplace, strategies to prevent sexual harassment should be implemented in tandem with strategies to address the abuse of power, to realize women's rights in the world of work and to improve women's employment outcomes, in particular for women who engage in the most vulnerable forms of work.[28] That includes women's equal representation in leadership positions and decision-making bodies, equal pay and the equal sharing of paid work and care responsibilities. While strategies to address women's economic empowerment are nearly universal, very few have connected those efforts to the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace.

48. Best practices for preventing sexual harassment in the workplace highlight the importance of a strong commitment from leadership; the articulation of a sexual harassment policy; regular interactive sessions with employees to increase awareness of sexual harassment and to challenge gender roles and norms; bystander intervention training; and regular data collection efforts.[29] While efforts to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace remain rather limited and fragmented overall, one good practice is to develop specific standards and guidance for addressing sexual harassment based on agreement among employers, unions and government bodies. Ireland, for example, has a code of practice on sexual harassment that gives detailed guidance on how to prevent and respond to sexual harassment. Spain has a similar strategy that sets out specific roles for employers, unions and government authorities in addressing sexual harassment.[30]

49. Other promising examples include awareness-raising programmes for employers (Colombia), training for public sector employees (Georgia and Republic of Korea), and certification programmes that allow private sector to gain recognition of their efforts to address sexual harassment (Rwanda). Japan requires senior civil servants to undergo prevention training before they can be considered for promotion. A programme to address sexual harassment in the tea industry in rural areas of Kenya

[27] UN-Women, "A framework to underpin action to prevent violence against women" (2015).

[28] ILO, *Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work: Trade Union Perspectives and Action* (Geneva, 2017).

[29] Donna Chung, Carole Zufferey and Anastasia Powell, *Preventing Violence against Women in the Workplace: An Evidence Review — Full Report* (Melbourne, Australia, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2012).

[30] World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC, 2018).

by building the capacity of women and engaging men is an example of a good practice to address the needs of marginalized women and to fulfil the commitment to leave no one behind. However, none of the reporting countries discussed labour inspection standards and practices, which are an important element in preventing sexual harassment in the workplace.

50. Engaging men in the workplace is vital to eliminating sexual harassment. Lessons can be drawn from other effective strategies to engage men in gender equality efforts, including the "HeForShe" campaign, which has brought together 30 male leaders — 10 Heads of State, 10 global chief executive officers and 10 university presidents — as "IMPACT Champions". As part of that initiative, male leaders make concrete commitments to advancing gender equality, including by mobilizing other men in their organizations to take action.

51. To prevent sexual harassment in educational settings, studies have highlighted as a good practice the "whole of institution approach", which includes a commitment from leadership, institution-wide and gender-responsive policies that set standards for expected behaviour and values, teacher training, comprehensive sexuality education, a gender-sensitive curriculum, peer support programmes and ongoing evaluation.[31] While few countries reported on a whole-of-institution approach specifically, examples were provided of specific measures such as workshops to combat sexual harassment in primary and secondary education (Barbados, Cabo Verde and Cambodia), curriculum reforms to address gender stereotypes (Jamaica), the provision of human rights education (Greece) and the creation of safe spaces for girls (Eswatini).

52. Preventing sexual harassment in public spaces requires a multi-pronged effort, with comprehensive laws supported by the gender-responsive design of public spaces, along with campaigns and community mobilization efforts to transform social norms that normalize and excuse sexual harassment.[32] Several countries are focusing on preventing sexual harassment in public spaces, including through the engagement of men and boys. For example, Cambodia has engaged tuk-tuk drivers to support women's safety while travelling and has also engaged young men to speak out against sexual harassment. Some innovative strategies include ensuring the participation of women and girls in the design of public spaces (Mexico), using public transport to disseminate messages about women's safety and sexual harassment (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) and conducting campaigns in public spaces (Switzerland). Despite a growing number of incidences of online sexual harassment, very few specific initiatives to prevent it were reported.

53. The United Nations system supports efforts to prevent sexual harassment of women and girls. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has created programmes that are focused on women's safety in urban public spaces, and UN-Women has supported programmes addressing sexual harassment of women and girls in public places through the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces programme. The United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women has also supported several initiatives to prevent sexual harassment of and gender-based violence against women working as market traders, who are among the most marginalized workers.

54. Within the United Nations system, efforts are underway to strengthen zero-tolerance policies, including through awareness-raising activities for staff and town hall meetings, along with efforts to assess the extent of the problem through staff

[31] Claire Maxwell and others, "Freedom to achieve: preventing violence, promoting equality — a whole school approach" (2010).

[32] UN-Women, "Safe cities and safe public spaces: global results report" (2017).

surveys and to reinforce procedures for responding to cases of sexual harassment and assault. To that end, UN-Women has appointed an Executive Coordinator to oversee the response to sexual harassment, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has designated a Deputy Executive Director as focal point for those issues, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has established an independent expert panel to provide relevant recommendations.[33]

C. A survivor-centred response to violence against women and girls

55. A range of services are needed to respond to violence against women and girls, with the objective of keeping women safe and supporting them in their recovery from violence. Women's organizations continue to play a critical role in the delivery of services and in setting standards for the provision of high-quality services to survivors from a feminist perspective. There is increasing recognition of the need to support women in gaining economic independence by providing social protection, housing, microfinance and other services to help women to gain access to paid work and economic opportunities.

56. The vast majority of services that Member States reported respond to victims and survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence. Those services were often supported by the United Nations system and inter-agency programmes such as the United Nations Joint Global Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN-Women and the World Health Organization (WHO) in several countries. Such services include telephone hotlines, case management and referral services, counselling, specialized courts, police and justice services, health services for survivors and economic support (Andorra, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Georgia, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liberia, Iran, Myanmar, Qatar, Republic of Korea and Senegal). Only a few countries (Cabo Verde and Cambodia) reported on measures to strengthen the quality of services, through either the setting of minimum standards or professional development, signalling that greater focus is needed in that area.

57. Good practices in responding to sexual harassment include the provision of information on rights; confidential advice and referral services to empower survivors; clear and accessible reporting, complaint and investigations mechanisms; and counselling services offered internally in workplaces, along with external options.[34] Information provided on support services was limited. There are, however, a few promising approaches that focus on encouraging survivors to seek support and report abuse. For example, Slovenia's law to protect the dignity of workers in the State administration has led to the appointment and training of confidential workplace counsellors.[35] In Australia, the military has responded to sexual harassment and sexual violence by establishing an easily accessible one-stop centre that allows for formal and confidential reporting of sexual misconduct and provides comprehensive support services to survivors.

---

[33] See http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/unaids-independent-expert-panel-on-harassment_tor_en.pdf.

[34] World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC, 2018).

[35] Jane Pillinger, "Safe at home, safe at work: Slovenia case study (European Trade Union Confederation 2017). Available at https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/document/files/slovenia_etuc_safe_at_home_safe_at_work_final_2017_0.pdf.

58. Some States have highlighted efforts to strengthen services for survivors of sexual violence through the development of coordinated multisectoral services (Chile, Croatia and Romania), guidelines to strengthen the quality of support services (Liberia), and resources to support survivors through the criminal justice process (New Zealand). While sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence, it has not always been clear whether those services to address sexual violence have also been available to women who have experienced sexual harassment. Services for survivors of sexual violence, including services to protect their sexual and reproductive health and rights, should explicitly be made available to survivors of sexual harassment.

D. Data and research

59. The collection and use of data on violence against women is an area that requires urgent attention. There are several forms of violence for which internationally agreed statistical methodologies need to be developed in order to enable a consistent and comparable approach to measurement. Such forms of violence include sexual harassment in public places, workplaces and education settings, and violence against women that is facilitated by technology. Several United Nations agencies are working to develop standards and methodologies in those areas. Even where internationally agreed statistical methodologies exist for measuring violence against women, significant investments are needed to improve compliance with methodological, ethical and safety standards, to achieve sufficient country coverage, to implement comparable surveys over time with a view to understanding trends, and to allow for the comparability of data across countries to produce regional and global aggregates. Data collection also needs to improve with respect to administrative data on women's use of services that address violence against women and with respect to tracking the long-term well-being and socioeconomic outcomes of survivors.

60. Several countries reported on efforts to improve the quality of data on violence against women, primarily in relation to domestic and intimate partner violence, through prevalence studies and better collection of administrative data (Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Cameroon, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Republic of Korea and Switzerland). Some innovative approaches to expanding the knowledge base include the collection of data on violence against women in the media (Argentina), violence against women with disabilities (Cambodia), social attitudes towards violence against women (Colombia) and violence against women in public spaces (Tunisia).

61. Efforts to collect data on sexual harassment have been particularly limited. A key challenge is the lack of an internationally agreed definition, which also hinders the comparability of data across countries. Some good practices in that regard include the collection of data on sexual harassment in universities (Costa Rica) and in public spaces (Chile). There were also limited efforts to track data on online sexual harassment and abuse. With regard to research, the United Nations University Institute on Computing and Society has undertaken research to understand the impact of technology on efforts to end violence against women, including cyberharassment.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

62. Violence against women and girls is a grave human rights violation with serious impacts on women's and girls' health and lives, families, communities and society at large. The most marginalized women and girls remain at greatest risk of violence and

harassment. Overall, efforts to prevent violence against women and girls remain piecemeal rather than forming a comprehensive approach that tackles gender inequality as a root cause.

63. Over the reporting period, there has been unprecedented global attention to sexual harassment, which has reshaped the environment in which women's accounts are heard. Widespread reports of sexual harassment highlight the universal nature of the problem, which is deeply rooted in gender inequality and unequal power relations between women and men in the economic, social and political spheres. Sexual harassment affects women in the private and public sectors, in the formal and informal economies, in education and in public spaces. Sexual harassment is experienced by women and girls as part of a continuum of violence against women and girls and has significant consequences.

64. Interventions to address sexual harassment remain inadequate. Many countries lack legal protection against sexual harassment, and even where laws exist, they are limited and do not cover the multiple spheres in which women experience sexual harassment, in particular online and in public spaces. The effective implementation and enforcement of laws continue to be key challenges. Women who have experienced sexual harassment are often denied access to justice owing to a lack of remedies and inaccessible complaint and reporting mechanisms.

65. There are very few examples of comprehensive strategies to prevent sexual harassment in different settings, with specific approaches for workplaces, educational institutions and public spaces. Given the scale of the issue, the prevention of sexual harassment facilitated by technology requires urgent focus.

66. Responses to survivors of sexual harassment also remain inadequate, with very few examples of comprehensive and coordinated services. Given the significant under-reporting of sexual harassment and its normalization, particular efforts are needed to encourage the reporting of sexual harassment and to make existing services that address sexual violence accessible to survivors of sexual harassment. In particular, workplaces and educational institutions need to create safe reporting environments for women and girls to come forward with complaints and to access justice and remedies, without fear of reprisal or further victimization.

67. Rapid advances in technology, with their wide reach and accessibility, have provided avenues through which sexual harassment and abuse are being perpetrated. The scale and impact of sexual harassment facilitated by technology, the impunity of perpetrators and the lack of remedies are significant challenges. Specific measures in the areas of prevention, survivor protection, remedies and perpetrator accountability are required, including the enactment of related legislation.

68. Significant gaps remain in the collection of data on the prevalence of violence against women that are internationally consistent and comparable, in particular with respect to violence against women facilitated by technology and with respect to sexual harassment in public places, workplaces and educational settings. Improvements in that regard are critical for tracking progress, in particular in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals that have the explicit objective of eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

B. Recommendations

69. **States should enact laws that recognize sexual harassment as a form of discrimination against women and a human rights violation and ensure that such legislation addresses multiple spheres, including the world of work, educational institutions, public spaces and online. Laws should provide options for criminal,**

civil and administrative remedies and compensatory provisions, along with providing for accessible, effective and timely complaint and investigations processes and ensuring that complainants are not further victimized for filing a complaint. States should provide systematic training to law enforcement officials to ensure the effective enforcement of legislation and access to justice for survivors.

70. In the world of work, laws addressing sexual harassment should protect women who are engaged in informal and formal work, regardless of their contract type and regardless of whether their perpetrators are co-workers, third parties or clients. Legislation should require employers to take steps to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, including through the enactment of policies and the provision of regular interactive training and by ensuring the availability of complaint and investigation mechanisms. Laws should hold employers, educational institutions and local authorities liable if they do not take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. States should work closely with employers and trade unions to establish codes of practice and guidelines on preventing and responding to sexual harassment. The prevention of sexual harassment should be incorporated into labour inspection regulations and practices.

71. States should develop comprehensive strategies to prevent sexual harassment and to actively engage a wide range of stakeholders, such as women's and youth organizations, the private sector and academia. Such strategies should include awareness-raising campaigns to promote zero tolerance for violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment; educational programmes, including comprehensive sexuality education, that promote gender equality, human rights and the development of skills to build respectful relationships, in formal and non-formal educational settings; and community mobilization programmes to challenge gender stereotypes, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes that condone violence and sexual harassment. States should adopt measures to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in child-rearing, parenting, domestic work and caregiving. States should design urban plans and infrastructure to ensure the safety of women and girls in public spaces and undertake assessments and audits to identify unsafe areas.

72. As part of the prevention of sexual harassment in the world of work, States should implement in tandem measures to realize women's rights at work, including with respect to equal pay, to ensure women's equal representation in leadership positions and decision-making bodies, and to support the balancing of paid work and caregiving responsibilities.

73. States should expand existing services to support survivors of sexual violence in order to provide multisectoral support services to survivors of sexual harassment, including health services (in particular in respect of sexual and reproductive health and rights) and justice, legal and counselling services. States should work with employers and trade unions to ensure that all workers enjoy their rights at work, including informal and vulnerable workers, regardless of contract type or status, and that they have access to information and advice about sexual harassment and access to support services. States should implement specific strategies to encourage survivors of sexual harassment to make use of support services and to file reports, and guarantee adequate and sustainable resources for specialist service providers.

74. States should, in accordance with the principle of due diligence, enact new laws and measures to prohibit new and emerging forms of online gender-based violence. Such laws should be grounded in international human rights law and standards. States should work with technology providers to implement strategies

to eliminate violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment. States should also implement specific measures to prevent and respond to violence against women that is facilitated by technology, and invest in research to better understand the problem.

75. States, together with the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders, should develop methodologies to collect data on other forms of violence against women, including sexual harassment and violence facilitated by technology, to ensure disaggregation by relevant factors and the comparability of data across countries and over time. States should also conduct further research on the impact of sexual harassment in workplaces, including the financial and human costs to organizations.

76. The United Nations system should continue to implement comprehensive measures to prevent both sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. Such measures should include updated training and guided interactive engagement with staff to challenge harmful masculinities, discriminatory norms and bias in the workplace. It should also include bystander intervention training to enable staff to identify and respond appropriately to victims and perpetrators in various contexts.

77. The United Nations, across its agencies, funds and programmes, should continue and strengthen existing efforts, including by remaining apprised of the extent of the problem through staff surveys; collecting data that is disaggregated by different factors; strengthening its investigative capacity, including by having investigators with expertise on gender-based violence; ensuring that processes occur in a timely manner; and facilitating the holding of perpetrators to account.

United Nations A/73/295

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 August 2018

Original: English

Seventy-third session
Item 34 of the provisional agenda*
Prevention of armed conflict

Report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

* A/73/150.

18-12850 (E) 050918

Please recycle

Report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011

Summary

The present report is the second prepared by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 for submission to the General Assembly pursuant to Assembly resolution 71/248 and paragraph 50 of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolution establishing the Mechanism (A/71/755).

In the report, the Mechanism outlines the progress it has made regarding operational and policy priorities, including in relation to the collection of information and evidence and the building of case files; support to national justice systems; the development of internal strategies, policies and standard operating procedures; engagement with stakeholders; and administrative and financial matters.

It also sets out the steps it has taken to address key challenges identified during the previous reporting period, including strategies to deal with the significant volume and varied types of documentation on crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as progress towards transitioning to regular budget funding.

The Mechanism seeks the support of the United Nations, Member States and civil society in discharging its mandate and helping to ensure accountability for the most serious crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the second submitted to the General Assembly by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The report covers the activities of the Mechanism during the period from 1 February to 31 July 2018.

2. In the six months covered by the present report, the Mechanism worked intently on transforming the vision presented in its first report (A/72/764) into reality. There were crucial developments in that period, chief among them being the operationalization of the Mechanism and the acceleration of its substantive work. With its secure and state-of-the-art evidence management system in place — as required in its terms of reference — the Mechanism's activities to collect information and evidence have progressed at a rapid pace. The Mechanism also developed a principled strategic framework to guide its collection of information and evidence and to advance its work on building case files in an efficient and coordinated way. The framework — or the Mechanism's structural investigation — is designed to maximize the Mechanism's positive impact on the accountability process and to promote integrated action to address, both now and in the future, crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic across multiple jurisdictions.

3. With its core infrastructure and technical systems are in place, the Mechanism has commenced building a comprehensive evidence collection designed to function as a central repository of materials concerning crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic. It is also developing its analytical work product to facilitate the use of the voluminous material collected for the purposes of criminal accountability and broader justice. The Mechanism is now prioritizing the allocation of its resources to its collection, processing and analytical work and expects that its capacity to assist national criminal justice actors with ongoing investigations and prosecutions will increase significantly in the coming months. In parallel, the Mechanism is advancing the first stage of its own work on building case files and expects to open two or more specific case files before the end of 2018.

4. The commencement of the Mechanism's substantive work has been reinforced by the further development of internal strategies, policies and standard operating procedures, designed to ensure security, efficiency and quality control. Several examples are highlighted in the present report, including the Mechanism's procedures for data management and for responding to the growing number of requests for assistance received from national criminal justice actors. In addition, the Mechanism has continued to develop thematic frameworks, including proactive strategies for addressing sexual and gender-based violence, as a core part of its work.

5. The operational advances have been supported by the Mechanism's sustained engagement with the broad range of stakeholders and other interlocutors essential to the success of its work. The Mechanism acknowledges the challenging operating environment in which Syrian civil society has been working, including during the reporting period. Given the demands faced on the ground and the depth of the humanitarian issues confronted, efforts to nevertheless advance the accountability process through genuine cooperation with the Mechanism are especially commendable.

6. The Mechanism continues to function in a complex international environment, in which it faces both challenges and opportunities and which has implications for its resource requirements. The Mechanism is working on implementing innovative and cost-effective solutions to advance its work and maximize its impact. The Mechanism is fast-tracking its strategic thinking in that regard to inform planning for the regular budget proposal to be submitted for the 2020 budget cycle. In the meantime, the

Mechanism expresses its appreciation for the funding it has received to date, which has facilitated the crucial advancements outlined in the present report.

II. Collection of information and evidence and first phase of building case files

7. The Mechanism has commenced building its broad evidence collection concerning crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. At the time of writing, the Mechanism had collected around 4 terabytes of data consisting of almost 900,000 records.

8. The Mechanism's approach to collection is informed first and foremost by the parameters of its structural investigation. Specifically, the Mechanism is collecting the information and evidence needed to map crime patterns, examine the contextual elements of core international crimes and understand the links between crimes and individuals, ranging from direct physical perpetrators to perpetrators wielding power and authority over the events. The Mechanism's approach to collection is also informed by the requests for assistance received, or anticipated, from national prosecution authorities. To that end, the Mechanism is, where possible, prioritizing the collection of material most likely to assist ongoing national criminal justice processes, on the basis of the information or requests received from those jurisdictions. Such material, in turn, is a valuable source of information for the Mechanism's structural investigation.

9. With the two afore-mentioned collection objectives in mind, the Mechanism has focused on the acquisition of material held by other documenting entities that is known to be of high value and of material not previously accessed by others documenting crimes concerning the Syrian Arab Republic or for which there is otherwise a pressing preservation need. Collection plans to date have included a significant focus on material from the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic,[1] on the basis of the memorandum of understanding concluded between the two entities in March 2018 (see para. 42 below).

10. While it is appropriate and consistent with the Mechanism's terms of reference to prioritize material collected by others, there may be omissions or limitations in that material. For example, it is necessary to determine whether existing documentation accurately records the harms experienced by certain categories of victims at risk of being overlooked, including women, girls, boys, disabled persons and persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and/or sex characteristics. Due attention also needs to be paid to sexual violence crimes committed against males and to ensuring balanced representation of crimes committed by all sides.

11. The Mechanism sees great scope for its collection of evidence becoming a comprehensive central repository of evidence concerning crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. This is feasible given the Mechanism's broad mandate, dedicated focus on the Syrian situation and its capacity to access material from a wide range of sources, including from within the United Nations system. Consistent with its central repository objective, the Mechanism is exploring technical strategies to facilitate and maximize direct access for authorized justice actors to portions of its evidence collection not affected by confidentiality restrictions.

[1] The Commission was established on 23 August 2011 by the Human Rights Council to investigate alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011. The Commission focuses on directly collecting information, publicly reporting broad patterns of violations, abuses and emblematic incidents and making recommendations, in particular to Member States.

12. In terms of methodology, the Mechanism commenced by articulating the objectives to be achieved by its structural investigation as part of the principles guiding its strategy for collecting information and evidence and building cases. The objectives were made operational through the development of overarching factual questions that provide the framework for the structural investigation. The questions are informed by the contextual elements of core international crimes and modes of liability that are likely to feature across the specific case files that the Mechanism will develop, as well as by the broader contextual considerations that are necessary to accurately understand the events in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism is working towards acquiring existing material held by others that is relevant to the identified factual questions and towards identifying new sources of information and evidence to fill already obvious gaps.

13. On the basis of those questions, the Mechanism has developed an information and evidence tagging system to process the material it acquires. The tags include categories relevant to broader transitional justice objectives, such as the search for missing persons, in order to maximize the value of the Mechanism's evidence collection for affected communities.

14. With the commencement of the its structural investigation and the associated building of its evidence collection, the Mechanism is increasingly positioned to assist with ongoing national investigations. Its capacity to assist will accelerate rapidly as its evidence collection and associated analytical work grows in the coming months. At the same time, the structural investigation marks an important and necessary first step in the development of Mechanism's case files.

15. International criminal justice processes arising from protracted and complex conflicts require the investment of time and resources at the outset to develop a broad and contextual understanding of the crime patterns of the conflict(s) and the structures or other enabling factors underpinning them. The need for a broad, contextual understanding of the Syrian situation underlies the Mechanism's structural investigation which, in turn, advances the building of case files in three ways. First, it provides a principled foundation for the Mechanism to exercise discretion — independently and impartially — about which cases to build. The volume of alleged crimes and number of potential perpetrators mean it is not possible for the Mechanism to build case files addressing all crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. Rather than proceed in a reactionary way on the basis of the first available, or most easily accessible, information, the structural investigation permits informed choices about where to focus the Mechanism's resources for building case files.

16. Second, the structural investigation promotes consistency of approach across the case files that the Mechanism is developing. Many of the key factual questions answered as part of the structural investigation will potentially constitute cross-cutting material facts in the case files, including material facts concerning any contextual elements proved on the evidence, such as the existence and nature of armed conflicts (for war crimes charges) and/or widespread or systematic attacks (for crimes against humanity charges). It also includes material facts concerning theories of individual responsibility, such as command structures (for superior responsibility) and joint action resulting in the commission of crimes (for co-perpetration). Past experiences of international justice processes confirm the importance of ensuring consistent positions on such material facts across related case files.

17. Third, the structural investigation facilitates efficiencies in the building of case files since conclusions and associated evidence concerning cross-cutting material facts established during the structural investigation can be directly and simultaneously imported into numerous individual case files.

18. The Mechanism anticipates that it will be able to open two or more individual case files before the end of 2018, drawing on the initial results of the structural investigation. At the same time, it will continue to develop its structural investigation, ensuring that deepening factual analysis is used to further inform the content of specific case files as needed.

19. The Mechanism's selection of specific case files is being guided by the principles referred to in its first report and developed at the commencement of the reporting period (see A/72/764, para. 4). On the basis of the results of the structural investigation, case selection will reflect a range of factors, including the gravity of crimes; the level and type of alleged perpetrator; crime categories emblematic of the events in the Syrian Arab Republic; balanced representation of crimes committed against victims on all sides of the events; a fair representation of harms experienced by men, women, girls and boys; crime categories and culpable acts or omissions that sustain the ongoing commission of crimes; and complementarity with case files developed by other actors, including national authorities and civil society. Overall, the Mechanism's building of case files will reflect the victim-centred approach described in its first report (ibid., paras. 4 and 22).

III. Support to national justice systems

20. As part of its structural investigation, and as the foundation of its case files, the Mechanism is building a comprehensive collection of evidence and creating an associated analytical work product concerning crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism is also ensuring that these growing resources can be made available rapidly to assist national prosecution authorities, consistent with the terms of its mandate (see A/71/755, annex, paras. 13–17). This is being done in two ways.

21. First, the Mechanism has developed a process whereby national prosecution authorities can submit to it requests for assistance. To date, the Mechanism has received seven requests from three national prosecution authorities. Currently, the focus of the requests is on receiving information and evidence. In the coming period, the Mechanism will expand this process to also include access to the analytical work product that it has developed.

22. To effectively handle the requests already received and the large volume of anticipated future requests, the Mechanism has dedicated a section of its operations specifically to dealing with requests for assistance from national jurisdictions and is finalizing the policies and standard operating procedures for processing these requests (see section IV below). A current priority for the Mechanism is to ensure that the increasingly large volume of material it acquires can be searched effectively to locate material in response to the requests received. This time-consuming work includes the allocation of substantial resources to implement rigorous processes for tagging and metadata creation. Relevant material identified through the Mechanism's search process is then reviewed to ascertain whether it is subject to any confidentiality or other restrictions and, accordingly, whether and on what conditions it can be shared with the requesting entity. While the Mechanism is already in a position to search its existing evidence collection in response to incoming requests for material, its capacity to assist is expected to expand rapidly in the coming months as its information and evidence collection and processing activities progress.

23. Second, the Mechanism will proactively share material if it becomes aware of any within its evidence collection that would likely be of assistance to an ongoing investigation or prosecution in an identified national jurisdiction. The Mechanism's ability to do so depends on the extent to which it receives information from national jurisdictions about the parameters of ongoing investigations and prosecutions. The

Mechanism continues to engage in dialogue with national prosecution authorities to maximize the information it acquires and, consequently, its capacity to reach out proactively to national systems.

IV. Development of internal strategies, policies and standard operating procedures

24. After entering into its operational phase during the reporting period, the Mechanism intensified its work on the internal strategies, policies and standard operating procedures required to ensure security, efficiency and quality control for its substantive work.

25. The development of templates and standard operating procedures in relation to the Mechanism's information and evidence collection activities has formed a significant part of that work. Given that its innovative mandate and that documentation within the Syrian context is diverse, disparate and voluminous, the Mechanism is developing standard operating procedures that can adapt to the unique circumstances of international evidentiary obligations. The process includes embedding data protection into the Mechanism's collection, preservation and bulk processing operations, and pursuing cost-effective, light-weight technical collection strategies. One of the first assets acquired by the Mechanism was an end-to-end information and evidence management system. By establishing how information flows through the Mechanism securely and confidentially, it has now integrated standard operating procedures across its team, in order to avoid redundancy in data entry and ensure efficient and available translations, that there are no isolated repositories; and that the governance of information is centralized and fully audited. Work on standard operating procedures will continue to be a priority in the coming period as the Mechanism's collection activities expand in both number and scope.

26. Another significant focus has been the development of a procedural and operational framework for processing requests for assistance from national prosecution authorities seeking access to materials in the Mechanism's evidence collection. The Mechanism has developed a template to guide requests for assistance, which has been widely circulated among national war crimes units actively working on crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. In parallel, the Mechanism has developed internal standard operating procedures for receiving and responding to requests, designed to integrate all necessary confidentiality and other safeguards, ensure consistency and maximize its capacity to provide useful and timely responses. The Mechanism is also in the process of refining its overall policy on requests for assistance, which will further clarify its parameters for sharing information and evidence.

27. Regarding gender issues, the Mechanism has been developing strategies to integrate effective approaches to addressing sexual and gender-based violence, and gender issues more broadly, as a core part of its work. Specifically, the Mechanism held a dynamic office-wide discussion on gender to facilitate and encourage internal engagement on the topic, which sparked dialogue on how best to develop gender-responsive working practices in the Mechanism's office environment and as part of its substantive work, recognizing the critical links between the two. Attention also focused on how best to address sexual and gender-based violence, within the Mechanism's operations, as mandated in its terms of reference (see A/71/755, paras. 19 and 32). The views gathered during that process have informed the Mechanism's articulation of the compulsory standards and values foundational to its organizational and operational culture. Training initiatives are being planned as the next stage of the Mechanism's gender strategy development. The initiatives focus on

deepening the practical understanding of all staff members of why gender matters in the practice of international criminal law and how attention to gender issues can particularly affect the success of accountability processes.

28. A further example of the Mechanism's strategy development concerns outreach to stakeholders. With the recruitment of an External Relations Officer during the reporting period, the Mechanism has advanced its work on a comprehensive outreach strategy designed to raise awareness about its mandate and to build support for its work through positive engagement with stakeholders, expectation management and correcting prevalent misconceptions. The outreach strategy addresses the Mechanism's overarching communication objectives and priorities, as well as the challenges it faces and actions required to promote effective exchanges with its target audiences. The outreach strategy will be regularly re-evaluated to account for the evolution of the Mechanism's work and the views of key stakeholders. As with all its work, the Mechanism's outreach strategy is guided by a victim-centred approach. In the coming period, the Mechanism will intensify its efforts to foster effective engagement with victim communities to further inform its approach.

V. Constructive engagement with a broad range of stakeholders and interlocutors

A. Civil society

29. The Mechanism continues to engage extensively with civil society, including with Syrian and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

30. The Mechanism acknowledges the intensely difficult circumstances under which Syrian civil society has operated during the reporting period, given the urgent needs of the communities it seeks to assist. In addition, the disillusionment of affected communities regarding accountability issues presents ongoing challenges for the work of both civil society and the Mechanism. In particular, the Mechanism acknowledges the impressive efforts undertaken by many civil society actors, despite such circumstances and the immense pressure arising from the realities on the ground, to cooperate with the Mechanism and to stay focused on the long-term goal of accountability.

31. Recognizing the fundamental role played by civil society in documenting crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic and the important contribution it can make to justice processes, the Mechanism has prioritized its follow-up to the civil society contributor surveys developed in the previous reporting period. The surveys were designed to elicit from civil society actors information regarding the type, quantity, format and content of material they hold that is relevant to the Mechanism's mandate. The surveys were distributed to some 50 organizations and the results are being collated to give the Mechanism an overview of the material in their possession. The results are informing further strategic planning for building the Mechanism's evidence collection.

32. In line with its commitment to ensuring two-way communication, in particular with Syrian civil society organizations, the Mechanism is engaging with them bilaterally and in group settings. On 4 April 2018, the Mechanism held a third meeting with Syrian civil society organizations as part of the twice-yearly meeting platform in Lausanne, Switzerland. Discussions with the 28 participating organizations allowed for a frank and fruitful exchange, including an opportunity for participants to obtain clarification about the Mechanism's approach to key aspects of its mandate. The Mechanism also presented some of the principles guiding its approach to sexual

and gender-based crimes. Prior to the meeting, a protocol of collaboration[2] was signed by the Mechanism and 28 NGOs, outlining the overarching principles to guide their engagement. It is aimed at promoting mutual understanding regarding opportunities for collaboration, to further the parties' common goal of ensuring accountability for the crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The principles outlined in the protocol provide a general framework for cooperation that could extend to other NGOs willing to collaborate with the Mechanism in the future.

33. The Mechanism is intensifying its one-on-one consultations with civil society representatives in relation to specific operational issues and thematic areas of interest to its work. Discussions so far have addressed numerous priorities, including specific categories of crimes, such as sexual and gender-based violence and the use of chemical weapons. The Mechanism is also engaging with NGOs that are working on building case files and on victim's representation in proceedings before national jurisdictions, with a view to learning from past experiences and maximizing coordination opportunities, consistent with the terms of the Mechanism's mandate.

34. The Mechanism is also consulting with NGOs, in particular Syrian civil society, concerning the work being done to document ongoing crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

B. National war crimes units

35. During the reporting period, the Mechanism continued and expanded its constructive engagement with the war crimes units of various States. Bilateral discussions were held with eight jurisdictions that are currently investigating and/or prosecuting crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism maintains dialogue with the relevant authorities in the jurisdictions, including at the technical level, to develop an understanding of current needs and to identify avenues for assisting national actors to address the crimes in question. The Mechanism has received, and is currently processing, seven requests for information or evidence from national war crimes units. The Mechanism is actively developing strategies to further broaden its bilateral engagement with national war crimes units in the coming period.

36. As part of its outreach to national prosecution authorities, the Mechanism is continuing its engagement with the European network of contact points in respect of persons responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, known as the Genocide Network, hosted by Eurojust in The Hague. Building on consultations held in 2017, the Mechanism took part in a workshop on 23 May in The Hague to discuss its work with members of the Genocide Network. Attended by representatives from 20 national prosecution authorities and law enforcement agencies, the discussions provided a valuable opportunity for the Mechanism to engage directly with national practitioners actively involved in addressing crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The discussions focused on deepening participants' understanding of the Mechanism's mandate and work and on exploring the possibilities for coordination between the Mechanism and national prosecution authorities, including standardizing working methods among relevant actors. The Mechanism also took part in the Genocide Network's regular meeting sessions, benefiting from the in-depth discussions on national investigative and prosecutorial experiences concerning the Syrian situation.

37. In parallel to its engagement with the Genocide Network, the Mechanism is also engaging with Eurojust more broadly and exploring options for participating in coordination meetings and activities facilitated by Eurojust regarding the

[2] The protocol is available at https://iiim.un.org/engagement-with-stakeholders/.

investigation of crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism is also continuing to liaise with Europol to explore possible forms of cooperation and coordination, given the synergies in their respective mandates.

C. States

38. In addition to engaging with national war crimes units, the Mechanism has engaged more broadly with States in three main ways.

39. First, the Mechanism is consulting with States about any formal frameworks needed to enable a broad range of cooperation with the Mechanism, including sharing information, evidence and support on witness protection issues. A spectrum of scenarios has emerged from the consultations. Some States have identified the need for legislative enactments to provide the basis for cooperation and some are already well advanced in that respect. Some have indicated an ability to cooperate with the Mechanism without any further formal processes, while others have indicated the need for measures that fall short of new legislation, such as the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding. The Mechanism is actively working with States to ensure they have the necessary information to proceed expeditiously regardless of which scenario applies. Throughout that process, the Mechanism is putting in place appropriate measures to deal with any confidentiality considerations that may arise in relation to material shared with the Mechanism.

40. Second, pending the adoption of any necessary legal frameworks, the Mechanism has already commenced the process of reaching out to a number of States that are likely to hold information and evidence relevant to the Mechanism's work. While attempts to reach out to Syrian authorities have so far been unsuccessful, the Mechanism is firmly committed to obtaining information and evidence of crimes committed on all sides, including those against the victims who are the most difficult to reach given the lack of access to the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. To that end, the Mechanism welcomes all initiatives from States to provide it with relevant information and evidence of crimes.

41. Third, the Mechanism is prioritizing broader engagement with countries in the Middle East, particularly those bordering the Syrian Arab Republic that host large numbers of Syrian refugees. The Mechanism understands the need to build trust with relevant authorities in these countries, with a view to promoting the fruitful cooperation required to facilitate the successful implementation of its mandate.

D. United Nations entities

42. The Mechanism has continued to engage with United Nations bodies with mandates relevant to the Mechanism's work. Most significantly, in March 2018, the Mechanism concluded a memorandum of understanding regarding the provision of information and evidence by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. The Commission has confirmed that, pursuant to that memorandum, the Mechanism has access to the vast majority of the material collected by the Commission over the past seven years. Procedures are also in place for the Mechanism to receive periodic instalments of material collected in the future. The material received from the Commission is being reviewed and tagged within the *framework of the Mechanism's structural investigation*.

43. Following the non-renewal of the mandate of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism in November 2017, the Mechanism has been exploring available means

for accessing its material. So far, the Mechanism has been able to obtain a limited amount of such material. Consultations are ongoing with respect to the provision of information classified as confidential.

44. The Mechanism has also coordinated efforts with the Operational Satellite Application Programme of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research for the acquisition of material including georeferenced data, satellite imagery and mapping. Such material is key to supporting the Mechanism's analytical activities, including in relation to its structural investigation, and to responding to the requests for assistance from national prosecution authorities.

E. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

45. The Mechanism has been exploring the options for gaining access to relevant materials from the OPCW fact-finding mission. While the Mechanism has not yet obtained access to such materials, the Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW, through a decision on 27 June 2018, instructed the OPCW secretariat to preserve and provide information to the Mechanism.[3] Following that decision, the Mechanism has been liaising with OPCW officials regarding its implementation.

F. Technology companies

46. Given the unprecedented volume of potentially relevant information concerning events in the Syrian Arab Republic being generated on social media, the Mechanism has commenced focused engagement with relevant technology companies to explore possible frameworks for cooperation. Strategies to preserve material for accountability processes are a pressing priority, although the Mechanism recognizes the need for social media providers to ensure that their sites comply with community standards. In the coming period, the Mechanism will intensify its discussions with technical experts on creative approaches to gathering and analysing the massive amount of video material relevant to the Mechanism's work.

G. Consultations on two thematic issues raised in the first report

1. Gender

47. The Mechanism has conducted specific consultations with Syrian women leaders, as well as civil society actors and NGOs involved in gender-related work concerning the Syrian Arab Republic. Through the consultations, the Mechanism has gained a deeper understanding of the priorities and wishes of victims of sexual and gender-based violations and of the importance of ensuring that consultations are conducted in a culturally sensitive manner. They have also served to highlight the specific challenges to pursuing accountability for gender-based harm arising in the Syrian context and constitute an important first step for the Mechanism in developing a proactive strategy to address sexual and gender-based violence as a core part of its work. The Mechanism also participated in expert meetings, workshops and consultations on gender, organized by United Nations entities and other partners with gender expertise.

[3] The decision on addressing the threat from chemical weapons use, adopted on 27 June 2018 by the OPCW Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW at its Fourth Special Session, is available at https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/CSP/C-SS-4/en/css4dec3_e_.doc.pdf.

2. Broader transitional justice objectives

48. The Mechanism seeks to assist broader transitional justice objectives, including the search for persons reported missing as a result of events in the Syrian Arab Republic. This accords with the report of the Secretary-General in which he stated that criminal accountability was an element of a broad transitional justice approach for the Syrian Arab Republic that included truth-seeking processes, reparations and reforms of institutions and laws (see A/71/755, para. 7). To that end, the Mechanism has consulted with entities involved in work on missing persons, so that it can integrate relevant insights into its work from an early stage. For example, the Mechanism's information and evidence tagging system now includes tags relevant to the search for missing persons, to ensure that such information can be easily retrieved as a thematic category (Ibid., para. 13). The Mechanism is also creating metadata for the material in its evidence collection to facilitate that process.

VI. A functional, longer-term operating environment

49. During the reporting period, the Mechanism continued its consultations with officials from the United Nations Office in Geneva to identify a longer-term accommodation option that would offer the space, security and other operational features required for its work. With some lateral thinking by all parties, a suitable and cost-effective location was identified and the Mechanism is working with officials from the Office to agree on a relocation date later in 2018. The Mechanism expresses its appreciation to all who worked proactively on identifying and implementing a suitable longer-term solution for the Mechanism.

50. As mentioned above, the Mechanism has also made crucial advances in building the comprehensive, secure and effective information technology infrastructure needed to house its evidence collection in the longer term. With full support by all elements of the United Nations, most notably in the Procurement and Transportation Section of the United Nations Office in Geneva, the Mechanism completed a rapid procurement plan to acquire an end-to-end integrated information, source, tasking, analysis, and evidence management system, while at the same time implementing a comprehensive information governance and data protection strategy. The Mechanism maintains its information within a data centre accredited with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), ISO 27001, which is subject to regular auditing of procedures and practices; Service Organization Control (SOC) 2 reporting; and innovative incident response that assesses and mitigates both physical and information security events. While recognizing that no software solution can replace the need for vigilance and the top-down managerial prioritization of information as a core asset of operations, the Mechanism has established a viable foundation in technology and governance to provide for future cost-effective innovation in rapidly identifying, reviewing and analysing critical information.

VII. Recruitment and a staffing structure to support the collection of evidence and the building of case files

51. As its substantive work advances, the Mechanism continues to refine its internal organization chart to more effectively meet its needs with regard to crystallizing its evidence collection and building case files. The Mechanism is committed to a lean and efficient staffing structure that incorporates expertise from the Middle East region and, in turn, builds the capacity of professionals from that region to participate in future international justice processes. During the reporting period, the Mechanism adopted two specific strategies designed to further those objectives.

52. First, the Mechanism has adopted a policy of "double-hatting" staff members across multiple functions to promote both efficiency and, crucially, effective integration of aspects of its work related to collection/investigation and the building of case files. Pursuant to that arrangement, several members of the Executive Office also work within the substantive team and several members of the substantive team perform dual functions across the team.

53. In particular, for the first phase of the structural investigation, the Mechanism's senior management team will have direct oversight of the collection and analytical work done by the Mechanism's investigators, analysts and lawyers. That structure will promote the effective integration of the collection and analytical components of both the structural investigation and the first phase of building case files. Under the direction of senior management, legal officers will play a crucial role in coordinating the day-to-day analytical and investigative work underpinning the structural investigation and the building of case files. It is envisaged that the Mechanism will revisit that structure once its working methods have been established and refined and the building of case files begins to accelerate. In general, most staff members take on dual or multiple roles within the substantive team, performing tasks within their assigned professional categories while also contributing expertise on thematic and other issues, including expertise on sexual and gender-based violence.

54. The second strategy adopted during the reporting period is to recruit multiple Arabic-speaking assistant analysts to work under the supervision and mentorship of the Mechanism's senior analysts. The first group of assistant analysts is expected to join the team early in the next reporting period. The strategy has the benefit of dramatically increasing the Mechanism's in-house Arabic-speaking and analytical capacities while simultaneously providing training opportunities on international justice for junior professionals from the Middle East.

55. Throughout the reporting period the Mechanism continued to increase its staffing numbers in key professional categories. At the end of July, the Mechanism had 20 staff members.

VIII. Influence of evolving external factors on the work of the Mechanism

A. Volume and types of documentation of crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic collected by others and associated storage costs

56. The Mechanism has been working with many of its interlocutors to assess the overall data landscape concerning the types of documentation available on crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The NGO surveys in that regard have been an important vehicle for understanding the overall data complexity regarding the types of available documentation, moving past hypothesis to reality. Almost all data types, including hard copies of documents, digital records, databases, images and videos, number in the millions or tens of millions. Adding further complication is the significant volume of duplicate and near-duplicate material, as many entities have been collecting similar material and exchanging material among themselves. Moreover, merging and collating both the unstructured data (such as hard copies and video) with the voluminous structured material requires the normalization of alternative spellings and transliteration of Arabic text. Reviewing and analysing much of the material will be painstaking, laborious and only efficiently done by fluent Arabic analysts. That growing clarity about resource requirements is now being factored into the Mechanism's resource planning.

B. Allegations of ongoing crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic

57. At the time the Mechanism was established, there was significant focus on ensuring that it would have access to the extensive documentation already collected by other actors of past crimes stemming back to March 2011. Since then, the events in the Syrian Arab Republic have underscored the pressing imperative for the Mechanism to also address the voluminous allegations of ongoing crimes. The Mechanism has therefore been developing a strategy to support the real-time investigation of crimes and to harness the additional coordination opportunities that exist with other relevant actors concerning that category of crimes. This, in turn, has resource implications for the Mechanism beyond those originally envisaged by its start-up team.

C. Increasing requirements for work concerning chemical weapons allegations

58. Alleged crimes involving the use of chemical weapons form part of the Mechanism's strategies to address both past and ongoing crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic. Addressing chemical weapons allegations within a criminal law framework requires the Mechanism to develop specialized approaches and technical capabilities. It also demands specific efforts to coordinate the Mechanism's work with other relevant actors, within the limits of the independence and impartiality imperatives of its mandate.

59. At the same time, there have been challenges for the Mechanism in gaining access to materials concerning chemical weapons usage already collected by others. Following the required consultation process, the Mechanism has so far been able to obtain a limited amount of material from the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and efforts continue to gain additional access. Furthermore, as already noted, avenues for the Mechanism to obtain access to relevant materials from the OPCW fact-finding mission have recently opened up. The international framework for attributing chemical weapons usage to groups or entities has also been in a state of flux, particularly with the non-renewal of the Joint Investigative Mechanism's mandate after November 2017. The recent OPCW decision (see para. 45 above) introduces a new element to the mandate of the OPCW regarding attribution of chemical weapon attacks. The Mechanism is now factoring this new development into its strategy on chemical weapons.

60. While accessing material on chemical weapons usage already collected by others is an important starting point, the Mechanism's work on this issue requires multiple further layers, reflecting the criminal law standards and methodologies that it applies. It must make its own assessment of the inferences to be drawn from the material collected by others, applying criminal law standards of proof. It must also consider whether responsibility can be attributed, not just to groups or entities, but to individuals, which requires the identification of specific evidence of such a link, which has not necessarily been the focus of work by others to date.

61. All the above-mentioned factors have resource implications for the Mechanism's work.

IX. Progress in the transition to regular budget funding

62. Following the call by the General Assembly, in paragraph 35 of resolution 72/191, for the Secretary-General to include necessary funding for the Mechanism in his next budget proposal, the Mechanism has been working with United Nations

budget officials to prepare a draft budget. It has made significant progress in developing the narrative and deliverables to frame its funding request.

63. It is clear that the Mechanism's resource requirements for 2020 will exceed the approximately $14 million estimated for 2018, which is to be expected given the operationalization of the Mechanism and the impact of emerging factors, such as those described in the section VIII above. It is only recently, for example, that significantly more detailed information has become known about the volume and complexity of the material in question and the cost of the state-of-the-art evidence management systems that the Mechanism is mandated to employ. It is now clear that, to cover those costs, several million dollars will be required annually in addition to the original budget estimates. Other strategic decisions, such as embedding a number of Arabic-speaking assistant analysts into the team, will also have an impact on costs, but represent an essential investment for the reasons given above.

64. Despite the many challenges, the Mechanism is working to keep its budget submission for 2020 within reasonable limits and to adopt strategies that will maximize returns on the investment of funds from United Nations Member States in the accountability process for the Syrian Arab Republic.

X. Supporting the Mechanism's work

65. Moving forward, the Mechanism seeks the following support to maximize the positive impact of its work:

(a) Assistance from the United Nations system:

(i) To approve the regular budget funding requested by the Mechanism for the 2020 budget cycle onwards;

(ii) To continue providing the necessary support to facilitate the Mechanism's move to its longer-term premises;

(iii) To ensure that the Mechanism has maximum access to materials held within the United Nations system concerning crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic;

(iv) To ensure that relevant United Nations agencies coordinate and cooperate with the Mechanism as appropriate in accordance with their mandates;

(v) To ensure that other initiatives within the United Nations system involving the documentation of crimes connected with the Syrian Arab Republic take into account the Mechanism's mandate and emphasize the importance of support for, and complementarity with, the Mechanism's work;

(b) Assistance from States:

(i) To commit, until the Mechanism receives sufficient regular budget funding, extrabudgetary funding to ensure that the Mechanism can operate at its budgeted level;

(ii) To ensure that any changes to national legislative frameworks required to facilitate cooperation or other engagement with the Mechanism are made swiftly and effectively;

(iii) To share relevant evidentiary and other material about international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic, including material previously provided to the Joint Investigative Mechanism;

(iv) To ensure that efficient and effective procedures are in place to facilitate access to their territories by the Mechanism when required for its work;

(v) For States hosting Syrian refugee communities, to provide information and facilitate introductions for the Mechanism with domestic agencies and local actors that are relevant to the Mechanism's work;

(vi) To ensure that any initiatives generated concerning the documentation of crimes connected with the Syrian Arab Republic take into account the Mechanism's mandate and emphasize the importance of support for, and complementarity with, the Mechanism's work;

(vii) To consider entering into cooperative agreements with the Mechanism to provide witness protection and support services in connection with the Mechanism's work;

(viii) To promote, in the context of donor funding decisions for civil society, coordination with, and assistance to, the Mechanism by civil society.

(c) Assistance from civil society:

(i) To ensure that the Mechanism has timely access to all relevant material to facilitate the accountability process and, to that end, to work towards transferring presently available material to the Mechanism;

(ii) To constructively engage with the Mechanism regarding coordination strategies concerning documentation work, particularly regarding ongoing crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic;

(iii) To assist the Mechanism in reaching out to victim communities and to promote an understanding among those communities of the Mechanism's mandate and work.

XI. Conclusion

66. With its core infrastructure, technical systems and longer-term accommodation arrangements now in place, the Mechanism will focus in the coming period on building its team to full capacity and further boosting its work on collecting information and evidence and on building case files. It will continue to refine its strategies and operating procedures, also taking into account the initial feedback solicited from key interlocutors. The Mechanism sees continued engagement with civil society, alongside sustained dialogue with relevant national criminal justice actors, as an essential part of that process.

67. In the light of the meaningful progress already made in implementing the vision set out in its mandate and first report, the Mechanism emphasizes the importance of continued support from the United Nations, States and civil society to ensure the sustainability of its work. The Mechanism is grateful to all States that have contributed financially to the operationalization of the Mechanism through their voluntary contributions.

68. The Mechanism's foremost priority is securing adequate regular budget funding from 2020 onwards. Its work in building a comprehensive collection of evidence, undertaking its strategically designed structural investigation and channelling the results into specific criminal case files promises to be of significant value, regardless of what accountability pathways emerge in the future. The Mechanism remains committed to expeditiously advancing the considerable preparatory work needed to support a comprehensive accountability process, for the benefit of all the affected communities in the Syrian Arab Republic.

United Nations A/73/296

General Assembly

Distr.: General
6 August 2018

Original: English

Seventy-third session
Item 54 of the provisional agenda*
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine

Note by the Secretary-General

The seventy-second report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, covering the period from 1 September 2017 to 31 August 2018, has been transmitted by the Chair of the Commission for communication to the States Members of the United Nations in accordance with paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 512 (VI) and paragraph 2 of Assembly resolution 72/80.

Seventy-second report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine

In paragraph 2 of its resolution 72/80, the General Assembly requested the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine to report to the Assembly as appropriate, but no later than 1 September 2018. The Commission recalls its report of 15 August 2017 (A/72/332) and observes that it has nothing new to report since the submission of that report.

* A/73/150.

18-12865 (E) 080818

Please recycle